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A' OOR AIN: THE MAKING OF A SCOTTISH NATIONAL CINEMA THROUGH SHORT  
FICTION FILMS 1930-2016

by  
Zach Finch

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in English

at  
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
May 2017

## ABSTRACT

### A' OOR AIN: THE MAKING OF A SCOTTISH NATIONAL CINEMA THROUGH SHORT FICTION FILMS 1930-2016

by

Zach Finch

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017  
Under the Supervision of Professor Tami Williams

This dissertation tells a story of Scottish national cinema through Scotland's short fiction films from 1930 to 2016. As a small nation within the United Kingdom, Scotland's film culture has played a subordinate role in relation to England's, and has struggled for decades to create its own thriving film industry. However, in the mid-1990s, critics and scholars began to talk of a uniquely Scottish national cinema, rather than the traditional and all-encompassing "British cinema," because of the success of films like *Shallow Grave* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1996). In spite of some key successes, the sustainable production of feature films has eluded Scotland, and as a result many have doubted the existence of a Scottish national cinema. I propose that instead of defining Scotland's film culture exclusively by its feature-length productions, we should think of it in a way that includes its rich short fiction film tradition.

Short fiction films are often overlooked within the discipline of Film Studies because of the commercial and cultural dominance of the feature. The short's relative obscurity and its limited accessibility impede analysis, as scholars must work harder simply to view the films. Nonetheless, short films are vital to national cinemas because they incubate film movements, allow filmmakers to take risks, and provide opportunities for marginalized people to make films. For example, Lynne Ramsay's "Small Deaths" is a clear forerunner of independent Scottish

films of the 1990s. “Chick’s Day” by Enrico Coccozza deals with issues like juvenile crime and poverty. Additionally, Margaret Tait’s numerous short films explore the subjectivities of Scottish women during the mid-twentieth century. Many others reveal the diversity and richness of Scottish film culture.

This work’s introduction and four chapters explain a number of functions of the short film heretofore unexplored in the scholarship, and work through several case studies of Scottish short films which illustrate those functions. The conclusion considers some recent developments and implications for both short films in general and Scotland’s filmmaking culture and industry.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

This project sprang from my longstanding interests in short, live-action fiction films and Scottish film and culture. As a short filmmaker, I value its potential, and I am well acquainted with its challenges, from pre-production through exhibition. As I undertook studies of film history, the relative lack of scholarly attention to the short fiction film struck me as a significant gap in the discipline. Concurrently, my interests in Scottish culture and film began with screenings of *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), and continued to grow throughout my post-secondary education. From Mel Gibson's film to the work of Irvine Welsh, Scotland is repeatedly framed as a country rich in history and culture, but a junior partner within the UK. At the same time, the practicalities of short filmmaking force anyone involved in the art form to be aware of their (and their films') status as lesser-than in the hierarchy of film industry and scholarship. Simply put, short films and Scotland are underdogs.

The statuses of short films and Scottish cinema provoked a number of research questions. These include: why are short films usually ignored within film studies? What is the relationship between national cinemas and short films? What functions do short films serve? What can short films reveal about a nation's film culture and its fictions? What can Scotland's short films reveal about its film culture and fictions? Until nearly the turn of the twenty-first century, the popular perspective was that there is no "Scottish" film. However, there were and are films made about Scots and Scotland, and films made in Scotland, and films made in Hollywood and London by Scots. For decades, though, there were few features made in Scotland by Scots. This absence of feature-length fiction filmmaking in Scotland seemingly creates a long void in Scottish cinema history. However, I wanted to find out how the image of Scottish cinema changes if we plumb

the depths of film history and look at the stories short fiction films tell, the stories of the films themselves, and the representations of a variety of Scottish subjectivities.

The current digital age calls into question many assumptions within film and media studies, from the ontology of the moving image to the concept of a national cinema. As all forms of media production come under scrutiny, the short film has finally begun to receive some sustained attention. For example, Cynthia Felando's book on shorts, *Discovering Short Films* (2016), is the first book of its kind since Richard Raskin's *The Art of the Short Fiction Film* (1999). *Short Film Studies* (Intellect), begun in 2011, is the first scholarly journal devoted solely to the analysis of short films. In terms of exhibition and popular awareness, most film festivals devote large portions of their programming to short films. Additionally, the television channel Shorts HD places each year's Academy Award nominated short films into cineplexes. Other forms of digital exhibition go some way toward increasing the visibility of short fiction films. Examples include YouTube, Hulu, and iTunes. In spite of the feature-length fiction film's continued dominance within film studies, the box office, and the various boxes at home, there has never been more awareness of short films since the beginning of the medium.

In the days of early cinema, Scotland was firmly enfolded within the British Empire. Though Scots were among the UK's most avid cinemagoers, native Scottish filmmaking was quite sparse. Today, Scottish cinema is remarkably diverse, and is, by many accounts, transnational. Furthermore, Scotland has never been closer to total political independence since before the 1707 Act of Union than it is today. A failed referendum on independence in 2014 was followed by 2016's Brexit; today, more Scots favor independence from the UK than ever before. An autonomous Scotland now seems imminent. These winding histories, from a nation-within-a-nation that produced no indigenous feature films for many years, to what David Martin-Jones

refers to as an example of “global cinema,” are told by scholars with a variety of perspectives (19). However, no one has told the story of the Scottish short fiction film and its roles in Scottish film history and culture as Scotland itself evolved and transitioned from junior partner in the UK to the brink of independence. As Jonathan Murray writes in *The New Scottish Cinema*, “the best any critic can do is to tell one story about, rather than the story of, Scottish cinema” (20). This work tells a story about Scottish cinema that places its short films front and center in order to determine the functions and value of this kind of filmmaking for Scotland, and its value to cinema as a whole.

Undoubtedly, short films from many countries deserve more attention than they have received to date. This is especially true for films from non-Western and post-colonial nations. The Global South, in particular, has had very limited study of its short films and short filmmakers, and this fact is an ongoing missed opportunity for scholars to engage with local and regional cultures, languages, and histories. Such studies would make for a more inclusive and equal representation of the people and the cultures in places either under-represented or misrepresented throughout much of cinema’s history. The scope of this project covers only one nation. Scotland provides a good starting point because of its simultaneous distance from (culturally and financially), and nearness to (geographically and the use of a shared language, for the most part) the major film industries of the UK and the US. As stated above, a story about Scottish cinema from the perspective of short films is necessary because an over-emphasis on the feature leaves out many important filmmakers, narratives, and subjectivities as Scotland moves toward possible independence.

The act of placing short films within a national cinema context requires a revision of that national cinema’s canon. This is because every national cinema canon is based on a body of

feature-length films. Film scholar Janet Staiger argues that the creation of any cinema canon is deeply political. Staiger notes that the film industry, popular criticism, and academic criticism all contribute to the formation of film canons for a variety of reasons. From early arguments that film should be considered an art form to sorting out the cacophony of the sheer number of films in existence<sup>1</sup> to academics' quests to make names for themselves, canonization has served a number of functions (4, 8, 18). Though she was writing primarily about feminist film criticism and women filmmakers, I agree with Staiger's contentions that alternative approaches, like focusing on women filmmakers (or short fiction films, for that matter), threaten the "center of power" (19). However, canon reformation should not be so inclusive to "allow some to support a reactionary or conservative politics that continues to reinforce the present domination of some by others" (19). In part, this project attempts to free film studies from the tyranny of the feature film's domination by elevating and analyzing short films, and thus redefining national cinema canons and individual nations' contributions to cinema.

This is an important task for a number of reasons. If a nation, like Scotland up until the 1980s, produces few to no feature-length fiction films, does this mean it has no national cinema? If our definition of cinema is broader than the feature-length fiction film most commonly found in movie theaters across the globe, then clearly any given nation does indeed have a national cinema that probably consists of shorts, experimental films, documentaries, animated films, and other moving image forms. The elevation and analysis of short films opens up new ways of thinking about various nations' film cultures, creating a more inclusive and nuanced view of a given national cinema. For instance, women have directed a tiny proportion of feature-length films; however, many women have had remarkable careers as experimental filmmakers, short filmmakers, and documentarians. The exclusion and demotion of short films from study excludes

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<sup>1</sup> She notes that from 1915-1960, over 20,000 feature films were released in the U.S. alone (4).

and demotes many women filmmakers who never had an opportunity to direct features. Racial, ethnic, religious, and many other minorities have been either systematically disqualified from directing feature-length films or face unusually daunting obstacles in that quest. Instead, many have made short films because of the short's lower barriers to production and, in so doing, enrich the film culture of that country. Rejecting short films marginalizes minority voices in favor of a more expensive and inaccessible mode of filmmaking. Lastly, even the current canonized films and filmmakers receive more thoughtful and full analysis if short films receive due attention. For example, the genesis of the French New Wave's characteristic style is apparent in the short films directed by New Wave filmmakers, like Truffaut's "Les Mistons." In that film, many of Truffaut's themes and his skill with child actors are on display, anticipating future works like *The 400 Blows*.

If the merits of including short films in national cinema canons are accepted, there remain a number of problems and questions. The first dilemma is the sheer number of short films to sift and sort. In a 2012 article in the scholarly journal *Science Fiction Film and Television*, Ritch Calvin observed that at least 851 short science fiction films were released in 2010 (115). Calvin also notes that the number of short films, specifically science fiction shorts, has increased dramatically over the past fifteen years, from 64 with some kind of web presence in 2000 to 167 in 2005 and 649 in 2009 (115). Finding, watching, cataloging, and making some judgments about that number of films is a daunting task. Moreover, Calvin refers only to science fiction films, excluding other genres which would likely increase the total number of shorts released in 2010 by several fold. Calvin does not sort the science fiction short films by national origin, so, in practical terms, arranging the films by country makes sense. This is not always easy because many films do not have detailed credits or obvious affiliations with film schools. Language and

locations are often key, but high budget shorts may be shot in a foreign country and foreign film students may make films in a language different from the film's country of origin.

The next difficulties lie in selecting and accessing a particular nation's short films. Value judgments and archival research at this stage are paramount. The shorts of famous film directors are often a place to start, as are national film archives, and references to particular short films in literature about a national cinema. The Scottish Screen Archive proved foundational for my historical research on Scottish short films, as they house many of the surviving short fiction films made in Scotland, along with documents and other information related to several of those films. For contemporary films, current publications on Scottish cinema, careful Internet searching, and approaching filmmakers directly proved to be the most helpful methods for uncovering significant works.

Short films may be numerous, but many are extremely elusive. Most early short fiction films no longer exist due to the deterioration of celluloid prints, and many contemporary short films are not distributed widely. For instance, not all short films are on YouTube (most are not), and even some filmmakers who place their work on a site like Vimeo often protect access by requiring passwords to view the films. Many more films are never widely distributed on DVD or VHS, and this includes films by well-known filmmakers. For example, this project includes an analysis of one of Bill Douglas's (Scotland's most famous art film director) short films, which is only available on a Region 2 DVD (which requires a region-free DVD player or special DVD playing software) and at the Bill Douglas Centre in Exeter. Even the Scottish Screen Archive does not hold copies of his short films, but his feature films are widely available. If an historian can sort through a deluge of short films, reliable access to those films is often a barrier. Selecting

and obtaining a manageable number of appropriate films for this study was a significant challenge, indeed.

Another, related challenge involved dealing with the term “amateur,” because many of the films in this study, and many short films, generally, are considered “amateur” films. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the culture industry creates roles for makers of culture, and then determine who fits into those roles. One of those roles is the amateur, whom Horkheimer and Adorno state must “accept organization from above” (122). In other words, even though the term is an invention of the culture industry, and is in their words “apocryphal,” amateurs are forced into their subordinate place within the culture industry’s technological and economic hierarchy and organization (122). As it relates to the history of short films, including up to the present day, this conception of the amateur and the roles they play still ring true. I acknowledge that not all short filmmakers are amateurs, and some short films are closer in status to mainstream features than others. The term “amateur” has certainly been complicated in the decades since the work by Horkheimer and Adorno, and some filmmakers blur the bounds between paid professional filmmakers and hobbyists. Many of the films in this study are made by amateurs, and nearly all of the films reside in that secondary place within the industry and discourse, but this is not a dissertation on amateur films. Rather, it is a dissertation on Scottish short films, many of which were made by amateurs in the sense expressed by Horkheimer and Adorno.

This project analyzes thirteen short live action fiction films which were selected to flesh out this story about Scottish cinema and re(un)cover a number of significant filmmakers. Since this project spans from the early 1930s to the present, I was keen to include films that represented significant eras in Scottish short filmmaking history. Unfortunately, the Scottish



Screen Archive possesses only about a dozen short fiction films produced between 1895-1929, and it is fair to assume these represent a good percentage of the total surviving films of that kind. This period was prolific for documentary and some experimental films, but the 1930s mark the beginning of significant developments for native Scottish fiction filmmaking. In this decade, we see the rise of socialist filmmaking groups, art students like Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar, and filmmakers like John Grierson who began to make their mark on UK cinema and even Hollywood. Though Grierson became the “father of the documentary” during this time, it was amateur filmmaking groups in Scotland who created fiction, experimental, and documentary works that rejected the capitalist and imperialist projects of the UK and throughout Europe. These works, made by Scots, are among the nation’s first filmic rejections of Empire and, implicitly, Scotland’s place as a part of that project. I was also eager to include post-war short fiction films because of two significant trends in Scottish cinema in this period. These were the proliferation of amateur film clubs and societies which created the vast majority of Scottish screen fictions – not just in terms of short films, but in terms of any screen fictions made in or about Scotland. The second trend was the rise of a small number of independent filmmaking artists who worked mostly on their own, using their own money and resources to create short fiction films. Recent studies have explored the work of Enrico Coccozza and Margaret Tait, both of whom made films from the 1940s-1970s, and this study includes examinations of their contributions. By the late 1960s and 1970s, film schools, the expansion of the BBC, and television led to new avenues for Scottish filmmakers and figures like Bill Douglas and Bill Forsyth arrived on the scene. Douglas’s feature work is widely examined, but not his short films; the way they reveal his later style and themes is examined here, too. By the 1980s and especially the 1990s, Scotland began to produce feature films and it is here that some critics began to talk

of a Scottish National Cinema. Short films became even more important in terms of training future filmmakers and expressing concerns of contemporary life. New public funding schemes like Tartan Shorts enabled more people to see Scottish shorts than ever before. As filmmaking of all kinds expanded, Gaelic culture emerged, too, and several of the first widely distributed Gaelic-language films were short films in the 1990s and 2000s. As the story of Scottish filmmaking continues, I knew it would be important to understand what short filmmaking means today in a country with a marginal feature industry, and many international financing and distribution partnerships.

The capstones of my research are interviews with two Scottish filmmakers. The first interviewee is Robin MacPherson, a BAFTA-nominated producer of several films, including shorts created to display Scottish talent internationally. The second interviewee is Edinburgh-native Lucy Brydon, who recently received financing from the BBC for her first feature. Prior to that, she wrote and directed short films which were screened internationally. The perspectives of these filmmakers reflect differing positions within the filmmaking milieu of Scotland in the last twenty years. MacPherson has a wealth of experience as an independent filmmaker working with a variety of organizations, initiatives, and well-known talent. Lucy Brydon is an ambitious young filmmaker with an ability to make the most of her limited resources. These interviews explore the difficulties of making short films, the role short films play in Scottish film, culture, and industry, and their films' themes.

The convergence of three recent phenomena: the academy's somewhat more robust interest in the short film, a more widely recognized Scottish national cinema, and an emergent Scottish nation provide the exigence for this study. In particular, the impressive quantity and quality of Scottish art from the 1980s to the present looks well synchronized with political

developments like devolution and an electorate more in favor of complete independence than at any time since the eighteenth-century. Regarding filmmaking in particular, public funding initiatives and training in the 1980s and 1990s helped a new and ambitious generation of filmmakers who ultimately directed many of the films associated with a new Scottish national cinema. These filmmakers started by creating short fiction films, and the importance of those films receives its most complete examination to date in these pages. While Scotland currently appears in the news because of its discontent with 2016's Brexit vote, its filmmaking output faces some jeopardy because of the nation's uncertain status with the UK and Europe. In the coming years, short filmmaking will be important because its future feature directors will likely come from the ranks of the short film. In addition, if feature production decreases due to barriers to UK funding or a lack of domestic spending on the arts, shorts will be Scotland's primary mode of film fiction. Given these developments, I knew it would be important to get a sense of the filmmaking environment today. For all these reasons – Scotland's increasing independence from the UK, its surprisingly vital filmmaking scene, and the roles short filmmaking plays in both – it is the right time for this project.

Short films are a vehicle for the less powerful and the less wealthy to put forward views and take stances on issues not commonly expressed in the mainstream cinema. This is true of Scottish short filmmaking, as the following chapters will reveal a diversity of filmmakers, subjectivities, and stories. Previous scholars hail the short film as a pioneering format for film techniques and style. Many praise the short film's ability to challenge and push narration and narrative strategies, too. In these ways, this mode of filmmaking is acknowledged as important. But in addition to that, I argue that the ideas and perspectives explored in these films uncover aspects of a nation's history and culture that often remain unexplored or repressed by mainstream

feature-length filmmaking. Independent feature filmmaking is much more likely to retain the alternative views of short films, but rarely are the shorts that influence them considered as fundamental to the cinematic narration of the nation.

Readers of the following pages will notice that most of Scotland's short films from 1930-present were created by socialists, women, local groups, students, and people living in the Highlands and Islands. These groups are often removed from metropolises and commerce centers. These filmmakers' relative lack of power within the UK and English-speaking film industries, and their wide-ranging, contrarian visions of Scotland and Scottishness are shared characteristics. As we will see, these groups and filmmakers found and find themselves at odds with the British film industry, the American film industry, and even the British government.

The common refrain amongst those who studied national cinemas prior to the 1990s was there is no Scottish cinema. This echoes the political status of Scotland because it is not yet an independent nation. Carol Craig assesses that the Scots' greatest cultural problem is a lack of confidence, and that may remain a problem as long as the narrative of Scotland is told by the wealthy, the elite, and the powerful in London. However, recent events like the independence vote and Scotland's opposition to Brexit indicate a growing national self-confidence. With regard to filmmaking, Scotland should be proud of its short films. These films provide distinct and alternate narratives of Scottishness and the Scottish nation. But long before devolution and the New Scottish Cinema, the short films created by the groups mentioned above made apparent the complexity of the Scottish nation, as well as, perhaps, expressions of political and cultural self-determination separate from the UK.

Three threads of conflict run throughout the history of Scottish short films. The first is that the short films of Scotland reveal an emergent and distinct nation and a national cinema that

is far more rich and complex than many of the stereotyped screen representations of the nation and its people in mainstream London and Hollywood films. The second is the winding path of Scottish filmmaking's complicated relationship with the British film industry. Scottish shorts moved from positions totally at odds with the London center of filmmaking to partnerships and alliances of varying strength with British film institutions. Examples of this range of positions include socialist filmmaking at odds with the UK's economic and political establishment; John Grierson's rejection of Margaret Tait's films; Bill Douglas's rise from squalor into an opportunity to attend the London Film School; and the creation of BBC Scotland. The third and final thread is the influence of American cinema and the American film industry's practices upon Scotland's filmmakers, specifically entrepreneurial practices in recent decades.

In many ways, American cinema is the cinema Scotland reacts to, and interacts with the most. Though the U.S. film industry did not invent the feature-length film, it was there that the feature became the standard for distribution and exhibition; this set the course for all developed nations' film industries, including the UK's. After the collapse of studio-produced shorts, the independent, festival-aimed short fiction film model came to the fore and remains important to this day. This development certainly killed any hope of Scottish-made short fictions appearing in the nation's movie theaters, and it placed the burden of distribution and exhibition squarely on the shoulders of the filmmakers. As Jonathan Murray argues in his book on the New Scottish Cinema, Scottish filmmakers adopted strategies from the American independent cinema of the 1980s and 1990s. The Screen Academy Scotland (Scotland's main national film school) is based on American-model film production educational programs. And, as of this writing, independent filmmakers in Scotland are forced to adopt American-style creative/entrepreneur modes of operating. By this, I mean that short (and feature) filmmaking for the independent, Scottish

writer/director is largely a free-for-all. Intense competition for public funds combined with increasing uncertainty about the future availability of arts funding forces many financially challenged filmmakers to beg, borrow, and steal their way toward completed projects – if they complete the projects at all. As such, shorts are currently treated like stepping stones to feature films. Shorts continue to receive too little consideration for their cultural value, and this attitude and the business of making shorts originate from the American-capitalist style of filmmaking that sees film as commerce above art.

This project aims to expand the conversation regarding short, live action fiction films by determining some of their major functions. To do this, I look at the short films of an emergent nation, Scotland, in order to show the ways those films tell stories about Scotland and its cinema.

#### Chapter Summaries: Chapter One

Chapter one begins, not in Scotland, but in New York City in 1912. At this time, Adolph Zukor led the shift in the film industry to the feature program, forever altering film distribution and exhibition. The American film industry imposed its priorities and methods early on in the UK, and Scotland was in no position to challenge that. This chapter tells the story of how Zukor helped develop a system of motion picture distribution and exhibition that led to a second-class status for short films, as well as any kind of filmmaking other than the expensive feature.

The second section of chapter one attempts to explain why short films have, for the most part, been overlooked by the academy. It also reviews the groundwork already laid by scholars like Fred H. Marcus, Richard Raskin, and Cynthia Felando. Work by Sergei Eisenstein, and later research by Leonard Maltin and Fred H. Marcus in the 1970s pointed the way for film studies to better examine short films. These scholars detail the history and narrative strategies of short

fiction films very well. Building off their work, I add to that a set of functions the short film performs; several of these develop the relationship between short films and national cinemas as well as the functions of short films in film industry and culture.

In addition to describing some of the key functions of short films, I argue in this chapter for a revision of the way national cinema canons are created, why short films need to be a part of those canons, and the implications for film studies. The chapter concludes with a broad discussion of Scotland's short film traditions, and the importance of looking at Scottish cinema through the lens of short films.

#### Chapter Summaries: Chapter Two

The second chapter begins with the story of Scottish short films from 1930-1979. Starting in the early 1930s, a significant strain of Scottish short filmmaking was socialist in nature, and countered not only tartan and kailyard tropes of the time, but the official positions of the British government. The first short film examined is Norman McLaren's and Helen Biggar's "Hell Unltd," and it exemplifies a progressive, anti-war, and anti-capitalist filmmaking made by Glasgow art students.

After World War II, socialist filmmaking dwindled, but amateur film clubs and independent filmmakers thrived. These two kinds of filmmakers produced alternative images of Scotland that were wholly unique for their time. For instance, Enrico Coccozza produced some instances of the first Scottish queer cinema, but he also made fiction films in many genres. Margaret Tait was a one woman film studio from the 1950s until her death in 1999, and she is one of Scotland's most significant filmmakers. She is important because of the way she probed into the everyday, and seemingly innocuous details of daily life. Her work is also obscure

because her attempts at penetrating the mainstream and reaching a wide audience were mostly foiled by the British filmmaking establishment. This is a common tale for filmmakers of this time. This chapter contains analyses of two films by Cocozza and one by Tait.

Amateur filmmaking clubs also figured significantly in Scotland from the late 1940s until the 1980s, and they produced the most Scottish fictions on film during this time. Their practices and their community-building traits shed light on another aspect of Scottish film culture heretofore mostly ignored. This chapter looks specifically at the origins and activities of the Dalziel Film Club from Motherwell, Lanarkshire, and one of its films, “Winner Takes All.”

The chapter concludes as Scottish filmmaking transitions from the 1960s into the 1970s. The significance of the rise of film schools and television in this period can not be understated. New opportunities presented themselves to Scottish filmmakers, most prominently Bill Douglas, who became Scotland’s most acclaimed art film director. This chapter discusses the origins of his style at the London Film School and features an analysis of his short film, “Come Dancing,” which foreshadows his later work on the *Trilogy* and *Comrades*, both in filmmaking style and its meditation on relations between men.

### Chapter Summaries: Chapter Three

Chapter Three covers the period 1980-1997. This era is notable for tremendous advances and the beginnings of more widely-recognized Scottish feature, fiction films. This period was also a time of social and political upheaval. De-industrialization, Thatcherism, New Labour, and Devolution all occurred during these eighteen years. As this project attempts to place Scottish short filmmaking within historical and social context, special attention is paid to these



developments along with more film-specific events like the beginning of Channel Four, and new public funding initiatives for short filmmaking.

The investment in film training and funding short film projects during this time was intended to create a home-grown film industry and raise the profile of Scottish cinema. The Scottish Film Training Fund is one example discussed in this chapter. With an improved set of funding and infrastructure for filmmaking came improved production values for some short films, but not everyone benefited. Amateur film clubs continued, though they were diminished as video challenged celluloid, and many clubs split over this controversy. Scottish short filmmaking became more divided between well-funded projects intended to train future professionals and those who practiced filmmaking as a hobby, or community-based effort. This chapter also shows that both kinds of filmmaking responded to issues of the day such as unemployment and crises of masculinity.

As filmmaking changed in this era, Gaelic-language films also proliferated. This is a significant, positive development considering Gaelic's status after the Highland Clearances and its long decline. Gaelic language and culture first came to film in the 1990s, and that is worth celebrating. This chapter looks at the short film "An Iobairt/The Sacrifice," a film made with funds from the Ghear Ghearr scheme which was intended to develop and promote filmmaking in Gaelic.

#### Chapter Summaries: Chapter Four

The concluding chapter investigates Scottish filmmaking from 1998-2016. This era is distinct for the ongoing effects of devolution and an increasingly entrepreneurial filmmaking culture. Scotland is now as close to independence as it has been in over 300 years, but its future

is still uncertain. The same can be said for its filmmaking culture. At present, there is relatively little public money available for filmmaking, but during this era short films became a vital part of the national cinema project. Funding schemes like Tartan Shorts and Prime Cuts developed Scottish talent, but a sustainable feature-length film industry eludes Scotland.

This chapter discusses the current status of amateur filmmaking clubs as at the fringes of Scottish filmmaking, and an under-used resource. The recent states of the Dalziel Film Club and the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society are revealed, and examples of their recent work are examined, too.

The centerpieces of this chapter are two interviews with Scottish filmmakers. The first interviewee is Robin MacPherson, a BAFTA-nominated producer who has worked as a filmmaker, educator, and administrator. He is one of the most significant figures in recent Scottish cinema history as he was instrumental in the development of the Screen Academy Scotland and served on the board of Creative Scotland, the main body for public arts. He graciously spoke with me about the film he produced, “Duck,” directed by Kenny Glenaan and starring Peter Mullan. We also talked about several issues facing Scottish filmmaking today and the roles short films play in Scottish film culture. The second interview is with the talented, but relatively unknown, Lucy Brydon, a filmmaker from Edinburgh. Her creative journey has taken her from New York to China, and her short film, “Babe,” makes apparent an up-and-coming talent. In fact, she is currently developing her first feature film for the BBC, entitled *Sick(er)*. We spoke about the challenges of making “Babe” and short films in Scotland today, as well as a variety of other subjects. This conversation makes apparent the utter free-for-all that is Scottish filmmaking at present. This closely resembles filmmaking in the U.S. with all of its difficulties and its emphasis on the filmmaker as entrepreneur.

## **Chapter II: The History and Functions of Short Fiction Films, and the Revision of National Cinema Canons**

This chapter provides an explanation for how short films fell into second-rate status within the industry and scholarship. It also reviews the academic discourse on short films, which makes apparent a dearth of study, but also growing interest in recent years. I contend that the lesser-than status of short films is a result of industrial and institutional machinations, and not something inherent about this form of filmmaking. The latter portion of this chapter argues that short films perform several functions in addition to the alternative stylistic and narrative strategies described by scholars like Richard Raskin and Cynthia Felando. These include particular industrial and cultural functions, and I argue that short films are adept at telling a nation's alternative stories by some of its marginalized people. Because of this, short fiction films should cause a re-evaluation of national cinema canons. In fact, they are vital in creating and shaping a national cinema, including in countries where seemingly no national cinema exists.

### The Rise of the Feature (and the Fall of the Short)

Short films were the only form of motion picture in the early days. Barely twenty years after its invention, though, filmed entertainment was organized into a hierarchy that marginalized short fiction films. The developments of 1912-1915 utterly transformed film as a medium by standardizing and industrializing film production, distribution, and exhibition. This privileged longer, more prestigious films with higher production values, usually based on novels and plays. Prior to the 1910s, short films were made and sold by those who happened to own or rent equipment, operating under widely differing financial and artistic circumstances. There were no truly large studios, and films varied considerably in terms of quality and cost. In an increasingly

industrialized U.S., film business leaders sought order out of the chaos of early film production. While a myriad of factors and technological changes contributed to the rise of the feature and the fall of the short, a key event in this new film order took place over 100 years ago.

On Friday, July 12, 1912, New York City was in the midst of another warm summer as the temperature rose to 87-degrees by four o'clock in the afternoon ("Weather"). Automobiles and horses crowded the streets of Manhattan as the day came to a close, but for Adolph Zukor, the employees of the Lyceum Theater on West 45<sup>th</sup> Street, and the audience that began to fill the theater, an evening that changed motion picture history forever was about to unfold (Krebs).

Thirty-nine year-old Adolph Zukor entered the Lyceum that night to witness the U.S. premier of a four-reel French film, *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* (*Les Amours de la Reine Elizabeth*), starring theater legend Sarah Bernhardt. This film became the first feature-length film to reach the shores of North America that also achieved an impressive level of commercial success. Zukor purchased the rights to distribute the film in the U.S. with \$18,000 of his own money<sup>2</sup> on a gamble that a feature-length film could be commercially successful in the U.S. (Cook, 34). According to his 1976 obituary in the *New York Times*, the Hungarian immigrant declined the opportunity to become a rabbi like his uncle and brother before him in order to go into business. He found his first niche in the fur garment trade before delving into entertainment. In 1903, Zukor and partner, Morris Kohn, purchased a penny arcade and formed the Automatic Vaudeville Company. Eventually, they expanded their business to Philadelphia, Boston, and Newark with the aid of Marcus Loew. Later, Zukor left his arrangement with Loew's Enterprises to pursue film exhibition on his own (Krebs). He did not wait long for success. The premier of *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* confirmed his hunch that films could be more than a plebian amusement.

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<sup>2</sup> This amount is equivalent to approximately \$439,000 in 2016 (CPI).

In the first decade of the twentieth-century, millions of immigrants came to the U.S.; cheap, silent short films appealed to those who had little to no English-language skills. Penny arcades owned by Zukor, Loew, and others provided entertainment to those immigrants and the working classes through phonograph devices, motion picture peepshows, and other, less prurient short films. Even though penny arcades were profitable, Zukor tired of them as he had with the fur garment industry. At the same time, his obsession with all things motion picture-related stirred him to action. Reflecting on the 1912 break with Loew's, Zukor said, "I was restless and impatient to produce full-length classical plays, which I believed would be the real future of films" (Krebs). Indeed, *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* was essentially that – a filmed play – just 40-minutes in running time, but far longer than the penny arcade films. Some multi-reel films had penetrated the U.S. market prior to 1912, notably *The Crusaders* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1911) and *Dante's Inferno* (Bertolini, Padovan, others, 1911). Both originated in Europe, but in spite of that, motion pictures were considered by the cultural establishment to be a technological wonder and an oddity, but not entirely respectable. On this night, however, socialites and theater elites, who had previously disdained most forms of motion pictures because of their reputations as lower-class entertainment, filled the Lyceum theater and cheered the film.

Because of its success in New York, *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* became the first feature-length picture to tour the country as a roadshow attraction (Krebs). With the blessings of "an invited guest list of theatrical and literary luminaries," and the financial viability bestowed by much of the rest of the U.S., the film made a convincing case that a feature motion picture could be both a respectable evening's entertainment on par with traditional theater, and a lucrative investment (Quinn, 48). Shortly after, U.S. releases of the Italian feature films *Quo Vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), and the subsequent

popularity and financial gain that came with them proved that *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* was not an anomaly (Cook, 34). Zukor's company, Famous Players, produced *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 1913 after netting \$80,000 from *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* (Krebs). It, too, was a big hit. Success inspires imitators, and in less than two years after the debut of the *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth*, numerous production companies sprang up to capitalize on the appeal of the feature film. As Michael Quinn points out in his essay on the film industry's transition to the feature film, the term "feature" initially referred to high production values and a differentiation from the other acts on the bill, as it had for vaudeville (37). Quite quickly, though, improved production values twinned with extended running times, and the feature film came to be the high quality, lengthy film worthy of top billing. Indeed, the success of the feature film was so impressive that most of the world's film industries grew in the following decade with the sole purpose of producing and selling the four-reel or longer motion picture.

Zukor's victory with *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth* was a catalyst in a major shift in the way films were produced, distributed and exhibited in the United States. Motion picture production's steadily increasing industrialization provided a response to demand for product, but, at first, distribution and exhibition varied widely (Quinn, 41). In the early days of film entertainment, an exhibitor could provide single-reel films, vaudeville acts, lectures, theatrical performances, multi-reel films (sometimes screened at a rate of only one reel per day) and other entertainments in numerous combinations. Films were rented at a cost-per-foot, and ticket prices for programs varied. Short films often filled the majority of the programs, along with occasional, longer multi-reel pictures, but no producer before Zukor showed a commitment to the production, exhibition, and distribution of long films as "the feature" of motion picture entertainment (Quinn, 48). Films of greater length were produced sporadically, but Zukor's

Famous Players was the only company at the time to propose the production a series of feature-length films. These “demanded longer-than-usual run times from exhibitors, high rental prices, and increases in admission prices” (48). Additional expenses required new and more intense advertising by distributors, and Famous Players was among the first to make these demands upon exhibitors and distributors. Zukor’s enterprise called for feature film production as the standard, along with its exhibition and distribution requirements.

The model of exhibition and distribution that privileged the long, “feature” film met with some resistance throughout all aspects of the motion picture industry. Quinn contends that

the view among those both those in the trade press and in the industry was that these competing perspectives [the feature-based model versus the program-based model] were irreconcilable and that exhibition would eventually divide into feature theaters and program theaters; one would attract the middle class and the rich, while the other would interest the working class and the poor (45).

Additionally, should the feature become the standard, many predicted that small theaters would not be able to afford to rent and show features because of their higher costs. Larger theaters would also be required to sacrifice vaudeville to accommodate “five-reel features” (45).

Ultimately, of course, many of these fears materialized as older, late nineteenth-century entertainment business models gave way to the standardization, industrialization, and legitimization of the long, multi-reel or “feature” film.

The swift transition to feature programming and longer films during 1912-1915 inflicted widespread and transformative consequences for film production, exhibition, and distribution. First, the Motion Picture Patents Company’s (MPPC) stranglehold on its licensees was broken, enabling producers and distributors to make films of greater lengths, where previously they were expressly forbidden by the MPPC to go beyond a one-reel limit (Cook, 33). Cook explains these overlapping changes, first noting that film producers “found that the higher expenditure for

features was readily amortized by high-volume sales to distributors, who in turn were eager to share in the higher admission returns from theaters” (34). Distributors formed alliances, and by 1914 these alliances “correlated pricing with a film’s negative cost and box office receipts (among the first were Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky’s Paramount, Warners’ Features, and Lou Selznick’s World Film Company), and these new exchanges demonstrated the economic advantage of multiple reel films over shorts” (34). In terms of exhibition, theaters “learned that features could command higher admission prices and longer runs; single-title packages were also cheaper and easier to advertise than programs of multiple titles” (Cook, 34-35). The spheres of production, distribution, and exhibition recognized their mutual dependence and the potential for new efficiencies and higher profits. Multi-reel, feature films may be more expensive to produce than individual shorts, but the streamlining of marketing, programming, and distribution around feature programs eliminated much of the chaos and waste involved with promoting numerous shorts and dividing longer films into single-reel showings over a period of days. Once the major players, beginning with Zukor, discovered that audiences enjoyed and paid extra for feature programs, the economic advantages of the longer film marginalized other forms of motion picture entertainment.

In addition to the sweeping changes in production, distribution, and exhibition, the feature film transformed the ways the public and critical establishment thought about this new medium. Cook argues that the longer film

made motion pictures respectable for the middle class by providing a format analogous to that of the legitimate theater and suitable for the adaptation of middle-class novels and plays...the advent of the feature, however, opened up the possibility of more complicated narratives and offered filmmakers a form commensurate with serious artistic endeavor. Features also placed a new premium on the quality of production as well as its quantity by demanding higher standards of verisimilitude. Longer films had to be made more slowly, with larger budgets and greater care than one-and two-reelers, and once the



feature was popularly accepted, high technical standards and elaborate production values became a new focus of competition within the industry (35).

The MPPC's prohibition on multi-reel films was now outdated because of the success of Zukor and others. It was clear that the prestigious feature film filled an unmet audience desire for more elaborate and higher quality entertainment. The most serious filmmakers, like D.W. Griffith, found the feature-length film to be an important mode of expression because of its ability to tell grand, sweeping stories which could make broad, often fallacious arguments about society and culture. For example, *The Birth of a Nation* plainly argues that the Ku Klux Klan saved the post-Civil War South. As producers and audiences came to value the longer film above all, the short film was simultaneously de-valued.

In truth, there was and is nothing inherently more artistic about the feature film than the short. Rather, the perceptions of both were a result of industrial changes, like new demands upon distribution and exhibition, and careful marketing of the feature as the best of all possible kinds of film. The early captains of the film industry discovered that much more money could be made with a standardized, longer product of four or more reels than with the haphazard production of shorts of varying lengths. Production resources were better spent on a set of longer and more elaborate productions that filled an evening's entertainment and thus demanded ticket prices worth a full evening's entertainment. For example, the 1911 *Dante's Inferno* was road-showed at several top theaters at a cost of \$0.25 to \$0.75 per seat; when *Birth of a Nation* was screened on Broadway a seat cost \$2.00 (Staiger, 1985, 133-134). Exhibitors and distributors also conformed to new advertising and pricing systems. Like many other products, consumers' access to, and awareness of, filmed entertainment became uniform, creating an oligopoly that defined the old Hollywood Studio System until the anti-trust Supreme Court rulings in the late 1940s. The manufactured kinship between legitimate theater and Zukor's vision of "filmed plays" brought

motion pictures into the realm of respectable entertainment. Indeed, Staiger argues that longer and longer films adapted from plays and novels “enabled a more faithful reproduction of these classics well-known to a middle-class audience” (131). Social and critical taste in filmed entertainment in the 1910s was massaged into conforming with a new business model of motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition. This model reflected the increasing verticality of the film industry in which producers of motion pictures came to control a strict, hierarchical film production (characterized by newly developed, specific departments such as camera, lighting, etc.), the terms of the films’ distribution and exhibition, and later even the theaters and movie houses themselves as the classical studio system took hold.

With the realization of the early film moguls’ desire to create a profitable motion picture industry, the standard became the most expensive and exclusionary mode of filmmaking – the feature-length film. The short film, now associated with cheaper and lower quality productions, often filled the time between feature film screenings. In addition to the subordination of short films to the feature, the film industry’s new hierarchy distinguished between different classes of features. For instance, A-pictures were granted the most production resources – more shooting days, higher budgets, bigger-name stars, and prestigious adaptations of literary works. B and C pictures were suitable for more generic fare, such as westerns and crime stories, and they often used lesser-known actors and directors. Short films rounded out the bill between features because they rated lowest within the industry ranks.

This new model, with its potential for prolific production and profits, spread into Europe and elsewhere. Many of the world’s largest film industries also privileged the feature-length program and developed variations of their own feature-producing machines, but short filmmaking continued in a variety of ways, including productions by amateurs. Scottish film and

culture scholar Duncan Petrie notes that J. Lizars, William “Prince” Bendon, and George Green worked as early exhibitors and short documentary film pioneers in Scotland in the early days (2000, 18). Fiction filmmaking was rarer in Scotland in the 1910s, with productions of *Rob Roy* (1911, Arthur Vivian) and *His Highness* (1916, George Green) notable exceptions (Petrie, 2000, 18). Interestingly, *Rob Roy* was filmed in a rudimentary studio constructed from the remains of a tram depot in Rouken Glen near Glasgow (Petrie, 2008, 18). Unfortunately, this site did not facilitate extensive and productive Scottish filmmaking, nor did the Rouken Glen studio become a satellite for the British center of filmmaking in London. Even though the British Empire was beginning to crack at this time, with the recent Boer wars and the impending Irish War of Independence, Scotland was in no position to go it alone in terms of a film industry. Few average Scots had the means and the time to make films during the early days of cinema, but this would change with the development of cheaper equipment and shifting social and economic conditions throughout the twentieth-century. A distinctive Scottish national cinema, brought about largely by amateurs and short fiction filmmakers, would have to wait.

Meanwhile, many of the world’s major film producing countries – France, Germany, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom – all pursued feature filmmaking and many implemented national quotas in order to protect themselves from the American industry’s domination after World War I. In each case, short filmmaking underwent the transition from the dominant format to the edges of the film industries. At the same time, enthusiastic amateurs with means and budding professionals in many countries made short films, experimented with the form, and carved out various places within each nation’s culture and filmmaking. These places included cinema clubs, student screenings, festivals, underground distribution, and, by the late twentieth-century, online.

### The Industry Changes Again, and Short Films are Pushed to the Fringes

Back in the United States, Hollywood studios from the 1920s-1950s devoted some resources, and even a little recognition to the production of short films. As Richard Raskin attests, the studios “produced entertainment shorts to be shown in movie theatres [sic] before the main features – ‘short subjects’ that were essentially vehicles for such performers as Laurel and Hardy or the Three Stooges, and that inspired minimal public awareness as to who wrote and directed the films” (1). While the writers and directors of the studio “short subjects” received little notoriety compared to the directors and stars of major feature pictures, the early Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences recognized the creators of these films. Beginning with the fifth Academy Awards in 1932, categories for “Best Short Subject (Comedy),” “Best Short Subject (Novelty),” and “Best Short Subject (Cartoon)” (in 1936 categories based on “One-Reel” and “Two-Reel” replaced “Comedy” and “Novelty.” By 1956, categories based on length were eliminated and distinctions were made only between “Live Action” and “Animated”) found a regular place in the industry’s praise of itself (“Official”). In many respects, the 1930s-1940s were a golden age for studio short films as well as features because of their popularity and the opportunities they gave for actors and filmmakers. Series of films featuring the Little Rascals and the aforementioned Three Stooges and Laurel and Hardy built upon the earlier work by legends like Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. The short film definitely ranked lowest in the studio system hierarchy, but for a few decades, there was a guaranteed place for shorts in U.S. film exhibition. That place did not last as the business of filmmaking evolved.

By the 1950s, the studio system was dying and with it, the production, distribution, and exhibition of short films. Paul Monaco documents that “Federal antitrust regulators successfully

sued the major Hollywood companies on the grounds that their control of the production, distribution, and exhibition of American feature films constituted illicit collusion in restraint of trade and competition” (9). With a 1948 decision, the Supreme Court stripped studios of theater ownership, and production of short films ebbed and then halted altogether because studios were no longer guaranteed the profits of a vertically integrated system. Raskin points out that most studios closed their shorts departments by the late 1950s because they could no longer dictate theater programming which previously guaranteed that shorts would be seen along with the studios’ A and B features (1). Antitrust legislation, combined with the new popularity of television, forced the studios to reduce the overall number of films they produced in order to remain profitable (Monaco, 11). The transformation from a vertically integrated system to runaway productions<sup>3</sup>, and the endless chase after the blockbuster meant that the short film, which was rarely profitable on its own (even though many short serials were popular), had no place in the cutthroat mainstream film industry by the late 1950s and into the 1960s.

Again, a change in the business model profoundly affected short film production in the United States. The shift to feature-length production and exhibition that began with Zukor made the longer film the standard and enabled a profitable star system and a tightly linked production-distribution-exhibition model. With the dismantling of that system, studios cut back on production at all levels, and short films were one casualty of that cut. However, instead of the permanent death of the short film, Raskin argues that the late 1950s witnessed the short “reborn as an art form in its own right” (1).

The modern short fiction film,<sup>4</sup> according to Raskin, is the product of a number of developments, one of which is the death of the studio system (1). As traditional theaters closed

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<sup>3</sup> Runaway productions refers to the practice of making films overseas in order to reduce production costs.

<sup>4</sup> Raskin dates the modern short fiction film from 1958-present.

their doors to the short fiction film, exhibition shifted, as “the creation of new international venues that showcased the shorts made by film school students and other budding *auteurs*,” film festivals, art house theaters, and “some cable TV and other channels partially replaced the mainstream commercial theater screenings of prior decades” (1). Raskin proposes that the modern model for short film production, distribution, and exhibition developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This era brought about a kind of short fiction filmmaking that “combined the originality of the experimental short with the telling of a coherent story” (1). Raskin explains the differences between short film and feature-length production, distribution, and exhibition in the “modern,” or post-studio system era, but there is also room to approach short films from new angles. For instance, short films perform many functions, these will be described later in this chapter. Also, it is productive to think about films in terms of national cinemas, as well. More specifically, it is fruitful to think about how short films reflect a nation’s various subjectivities rather than a unified idea of national identity. Short films tell stories by a nation’s outsiders and underdogs more often because barriers to actually making the films are somewhat less than features.

These aspects of short film studies have yet to receive much attention, in large part due to the fact that the film studies discipline is broad, fragmented, and, in many ways, shaped by cultural, social, and economic forces that tend to overlook smaller films. These include short films, generally, but especially short films from countries without strong film industries.

### The State of Short Film Studies

The short’s status as an under-studied artifact within film history, theory, and criticism is one of the consequences of the standardization of the feature-length program in the mid-1910s.

The vast majority of studies on individual films and individual filmmakers center on feature-length films and feature-length filmmakers. Thus, the official history of film is primarily the history of theatrically released feature-length films, though narrowly or unreleased and obscure features (as well as shorts) greatly outnumber the “legitimate” features.

While the body of literature on experimental films is substantial, there is far less written about the short, narrative fiction film. The works of Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Kenneth Anger, Michael Snow, and many others are well known and thoroughly studied for their importance to the medium. But there is far too little scholarship on the short fiction films directed by even well-known directors like Roman Polanski and Francois Truffaut. Most shorts made by those who made no (or very few) features are almost totally ignored. The reasons for this are institutional and practical: the sheer number of short films produced annually make it difficult for more than a few extensive scholarly conversations, and opportunities to see short films remain limited for the scholar and the general moviegoer, though this situation has changed somewhat over the last twenty years. Nonetheless, in spite of the short’s significant percentage of the world’s total filmmaking output, nearly 100 years of film scholarship yielded too little study of the form.

Scholarly short film studies begin with a famous filmmaker and theorist. Sergei Eisenstein’s *On the Composition of the Short Fiction Scenario* is likely the earliest theoretical work to focus on the short fiction film. This piece is a transcription of a June, 1941 lecture given by the legendary Soviet filmmaker just after the Nazi invasion. Eisenstein discusses story construction, arguing that filmmakers should ideally make short, incisive films in order to inspire patriotism and rally the Soviet people. This was, in part, because no feature-length propaganda film at the time could be completed in time to serve the immediate national emergency (Leyda,

5). At a time when Hollywood was producing films featuring The Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, and other extremely simple and formulaic fictional shorts, Eisenstein argued that straightforward storytelling was boring, and that the short's potential to motivate the people to action (in this case, to win the propaganda war against the Nazis) was vast. He was among the first on record to discuss advanced storytelling strategies and the potential political impact of the short. In *On the Composition*, the director of *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *Strike* (1925) advocates for the application of his ideas of montage to short narratives, and he also promotes adaptations of literary short stories – a key source of material that was and still is mined by independents and amateur short filmmakers. Short films, according to Eisenstein, should accumulate details through montage in order to involve viewers and make a strong impression and incite action. These ideas are similar to some of the scholarship on short prose stories and his own thoughts on the value of montage (10).

Eisenstein realized that short films could be produced more quickly and cheaply than features, and their influence could also be more immediate (9). This is necessary at a time of national crisis, but Eisenstein also realized the sharp national(ist) tool short films could be, if made properly. Unfortunately for film scholarship and work on the short film in particular, this lecture remained untranslated and only narrowly distributed until 1984, with its publication in book form by Seagull Books and the Eisenstein Cine Club in Calcutta. Currently, this work is out of print and copies are difficult to come by, though it is referenced and given a bit of discussion in book-length studies of Eisenstein and his works, like David Bordwell's *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Routledge, 2005) and Richard Taylor's *The Eisenstein Reader* (BFI, 2008). The fact that this work is out of print and rarely reproduced compared to many of Eisenstein's other



theoretical writings gives another indication as to the marginalization of the short within film studies.

With a few exceptions, the period from 1942-1971 was nearly barren for theoretical and critical work on the short fiction film. In 1959, Jean-Luc Godard wrote in *Cahiers du Cinéma* his reviews from the French Festival of Short Films at Tours. Film scholar Cynthia Felando notes that his tone is ambivalent, with his key phrase that ““a short film does not have time to *think*,”” indicating that the chief limitation of short films is the lack of time to delve into a character’s subjectivity (45). Felando rightly points out that Godard qualifies this by praising many of the shorts at the festival and stating that short films are like an ““antibody”” to the cinema, making it stronger (46). Though Godard does not explain what he means, he, like many others, struggled to distinguish short films from features and explain their functions. *New York Times* film critic Renata Adler wrote in 1968 that short films are “an art form in their own right” and “one reason why short films are often likely to be superior to the features they accompany is that shorts without the cumbersome apparatus of features – the sums of money and quantities of people involved, the many leveled decisions, the compromise – can be made with a particular unity and coherence out of a single mind and imagination” (D11). Felando builds upon Adler and others to identify unity as a distinctive characteristic of the short film. This unity is not the unity of the Hollywood feature, which weaves multiple plot threads into a whole, but rather unity motivated by a single, focused idea or theme.

As the 1960s passed into the 1970s, film studies became an academic discipline within university departments, and film production programs propagated, too. These developments inched the scholarly conversation about the short fiction film forward. Leonard Maltin’s 1972 book, *Selected Short Subjects: From Spanky to the Three Stooges* detailed the history of

Hollywood's short subject and serial productions, including films featuring Our Gang, the Bowery Boys, Edgar Kennedy, Buster Keaton, and more. The book primarily functions as a reference text, though it was among the first to detail this aspect of the Hollywood studio system's output. This would be followed by later studies of Hollywood studio-era shorts, like Ted Okuda's and Edward Watz's *The Columbia Comedy Shorts: Two-Reel Hollywood Film Comedies, 1933-1958*. These books carved a place for short films in academic film history by examining production and narrative. Eisenstein's hint at connecting short films to the nation remained just that for a long time, as others began to explore the short film's specificity and its distinct narrative strategies.

In addition to histories and reference books on the Hollywood short films, academia embraced teaching short films in the 1970s via literature, specifically, short stories. Fred H. Marcus's 1977 book *Short Story/Short Film* justifies the teaching of short films in tandem with short stories thusly:

*Short Story/Short Film* reflects a phenomenon of the past decade. For many years, the motion picture industry ransacked literary storehouses seeking sources for feature films. Only during the last ten years, however, have short films adapted from short stories become numerous enough and attained the quality necessary to merit serious academic study (xi).

This quote from the preface betrays the dominant academic attitude toward short fiction films in the decades up to that point: they were unworthy of study. According to Marcus's book, the short films that deserve close scrutiny are adapted from canonical literary sources, such as Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," Anton Chekhov's "The Bet," Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and several others. But, as we will see later in this chapter (and in chapter two on early Scottish short films), short fiction films were "numerous enough" and of a "quality" to merit study long before the late 1960s.

According to Marcus, *Short Story/Short Film* serves a pedagogical purpose. Specifically, it aids English instructors in teaching the interpretation and analysis of short stories and short film adaptations. Noting the proliferation of film courses in colleges and universities and their increasing importance, Marcus writes

Similarities between film and fiction as storytelling modes are apparent. Ironically, however, it is the study of differences between the two media that students are most likely to learn more about how each medium works. Just as close textual study of a story is crucial to sharpening a student's literary perception, so close cinematic scrutiny is necessary to develop a student's sensitivity to the strategies and techniques of a filmmaker (xii).

Basic comparisons between the media and their storytelling strategies introduce each chapter, and they revisit some of the arguments about the nature of film as an art form (for instance, Marcus agrees with Raymond Durgnat's 1967 description of film as "a potpourri of art forms" (129)) and the differences between film and fiction ("Most simply, film is visual; fiction is verbal") (129). Nevertheless, the value of Marcus's text lies in its structure and methodology for the study of short films.

*Short Story/Short Film* sets up an unofficial format for the close study of short films that remains in use. As a study of short films adapted from short stories, the reprinted full text of each short story follows a brief discussion of issues related to film and short fiction storytelling. The film's screenplay, and/or continuity shooting script, and/or storyboards, and/or still frames follow the reprinted short story. A brief critical essay ends the discussion of the particular film, and these vary in topic; some include comparisons between the print and film version of the story, others deal with particular themes. By developing a method that incorporates a variety of materials, such as the screenplay, shooting script, and storyboards, Marcus sets a precedent for short film study that reveals several advantages that scholars later followed.

Among those advantages, *Short Story/Short Film* makes apparent the accessibility of the short film to close scrutiny. Because the films are short, a whole film's script, storyboards, and an image or two from each shot may be included in an analysis. This enables a full and comprehensive textual study to take place in a minimum amount of space. An equivalent level of scrutiny of a feature film is very difficult to achieve because of its length (a reprint of a feature screenplay alone would likely occupy 100 pages or more), and it would be nearly impossible to analyze several features in one book with the amount of detail that *Short Story/Short Film* contains. In a close study of short films, scholars and students may easily compare original text to script, and variations of the script to each other, and all of the above to the still images from the actual film in addition to critical interpretation and theoretical work. Prior to Marcus's book, there was no standard way of performing a "close reading" of a short film.

In *Short Story/Short Film*, Marcus recognized the growing number of film studies courses in academia, and the rise of film production programs at educational institutions throughout the world from the mid-1960s as a parallel trend. This is significant for two reasons. First, a large number of new student filmmakers began to make short films as they learned the art and craft, greatly increasing the total number of short films produced and screened at festivals and other venues. These students needed a way to study short films as texts. Second, a large number of books on filmmaking, screenwriting, and other related topics were published to meet educational demands. Several of these books tailored their lessons to the short filmmaker and the short screenwriter. To varying degrees, the authors of books on short scriptwriting present arguments about the value of the short film, and how to tell an effective story in that medium.

The 1991 edition of William H. Phillips's *Writing Short Scripts* was the first book addressed to the short film screenwriter, and it inspired a number of imitators in the 1990s and

2000s that focused on writing the short script. In addition to its value for film production educators, students, and filmmakers, Phillips makes claims regarding some of the specific characteristics of the short film that separate it from the feature. He argues in the second edition that

The best short films and short scripts usually have one or two major, unchanging characters seen during a brief story time (usually a few days or less), who have one goal (usually unspoken) and who encounter several obstacles in trying to reach it. Although short films and feature films have much in common, they differ in several important respects. Most feature films contain one or more major, changing characters seen during a story time that may be weeks, months, or years, with two or more major goals and many obstacles to overcome, some of them involved and time-consuming (1999, xiii).

Phillips describes and prescribes the narrative characteristics of many successful short fiction films for the aspiring short scriptwriter. In this work, and in the various editions of his introductory film textbook, *Film: An Introduction* (Bedford/St. Martin's 1999, 2002, 2005, 2009), he also moves to separate the short film from the feature in terms of its narratives and purposes. He writes,

At its best, a short fictional film is not a shortened and compressed feature but a flexible and expressive form in its own right. Its brevity, like that of a short story, can be an advantage. Compared with a feature film, a short film may be more compressed, demanding and subtle. And since its budget is relatively small, its makers are under far fewer financial pressures to conform to the usual Hollywood movie format and are freer to be true to their vision (258-9).

However, most short film screenwriting books published after Phillips's 1991 text do not even devote cursory attention to what separates the short film from the feature-length in terms other than running time, or other critical and theoretical concerns.

Overall, the number of books on short filmmaking dwarfs the books, articles, and essays devoted to the history, theory, and criticism of short films. The publishing industry has produced a great quantity of books devoted to making short films since the 1990s, and the focus is squarely on tips and strategies that will cause a film to attract the right kind of attention and land a

Hollywood deal for its producers. This is expected because the goal for many students and independent filmmakers is to break into the various film and television industries throughout the world. Thus, these books contain advice and examples of a mostly practical nature, with little theoretical or historical grounding. Occasionally, a book on short filmmaking devotes a few pages to the history of the short film, or the distinctiveness of the art form. For instance, Max and Clifford Thurlow's *Making Short Films: The Complete Guide from Script to Screen* contains a tremendous amount of information in its 492 pages to lead the filmmaker from idea to distribution. Thirteen of those pages are devoted to a history early filmmaking and short films as they are known today. The authors attribute the modern short film to French New Wave filmmakers like Francois Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, and Claude Chabrol and the shorts they directed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Thurlows write that these directors gave "a sense of place to the short film. In a short there is an opportunity to reshuffle the cards of film language and take on themes commercial producers avoid on both commercial grounds and the fear of the new" (400). While this book lacks critical analysis, it contains (as do several other books on short filmmaking) several useful materials like reprinted scripts, storyboards, still images, and interviews with filmmakers.

Unfortunately, many books devoted to short filmmaking do not even address the basic aspects of film history or theory, or that the short film should serve purposes other than as a calling card for the industry. For instance, *Making it Big in Shorts: The Ultimate Filmmaker's Guide to Short Films* by Kim Adelman contains chapters entitled "Seven Secrets for Success," "Bet on Me: Getting Funded," "iTunes, Cell Phones, and Beyond: How to Get Rich Off Your Short," and "Parlaying Your Little Film into a Big Career" (v-vi). *How Not to Make a Short Film: Secrets from a Sundance Programmer* by Roberta Marie Munroe includes a Foreword

written by Tom Quinn, an executive for Magnolia Pictures. In it he states: “In the era of the matinee idol, the American public had grown accustomed to seeing theatrical shorts where they were meant to be seen. And then Reagan got into office and it all went to sh\*t. Okay, I have no clue why the theatrical short went away, but once again short filmmakers were an overlooked group relegated to an artistic ghetto” (xv). This real or feigned ignorance of film history by a Hollywood executive reveals a commerce-first mentality, and at worst might goad filmmakers and students into simply accepting the status of the short film within an “artistic ghetto” as the way things are, rather than as a result of industrial and cultural contingencies. Munroe’s book also contains a chapter entitled “Money, Money, Money,” and there is a repeated emphasis on instructing filmmakers how to avoid clichés, with another chapter dubbed “Keep it Fresh (Script Story)” and an appendix “Top Short Filmmaker Clichés” (vii-viii). These, and other books like them, add little to the scholarly conversation regarding short films and the cultural work they do, but instead most often seek to capitalize on the perceived commercial ambitions of aspiring filmmakers. In turn, though, these books are outnumbered by feature-oriented filmmaking guidebooks, like Robert Rodriguez’s *Rebel Without a Crew: Or How a 23-Year-Old Filmmaker with \$7,000 Became a Hollywood Player* and *The Filmmaker’s Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age: 2013 Edition* (by Steven Asher and Edward Pincus).

I acknowledge that one of the chief functions of a short film can be to prepare filmmakers for longer projects, but short films can also be a key component of developing a national cinema and film culture, as well as revealing heretofore unseen subjectivities. Film culture, in turn, is a major element of a nation’s creative output, representing itself to the nation and abroad, and, in the case of Scotland, asserting a cultural independence before a political one.

This abundance of material devoted to filmmaking and industry penetration, rather than history and criticism, contributes to the perception that short films are only industry calling cards, instead of cultural expressions in their own right. Shorts' near-abolishment from theatrical exhibition (excepting festivals and special screenings) diminishes their presence and visibility, too. However, a few scholars since the mid-1990s took on several difficulties and advanced the study of the short film by theorizing some of its distinct narrative strategies.

By the mid-1990s, DVD and online distribution increased short films' availability and some scholars began advancing the scholarship on short films in journals and books. The most prolific of these is Richard Raskin, co-founder and editor of the Danish film studies bi-annual journal *P.O.V.* (1996-2009), author of *The Art of the Short Fiction Film: A Shot-by-Shot Study of Nine Modern Classics* (McFarland, 2002), and later the founding editor of the journal, *Short Film Studies* (Intellect, 2011-present). *P.O.V.* was based in the Department of Information and Media Studies of Aarhus University in Aarhus, Denmark, and all 28 issues of the journal's fourteen-year run are available online. The first issue of *P.O.V.* in March, 1996 focused on three short films, featuring film date, a detailed synopsis and outline, and critical essays on each film. Many of the critical essays in the early issues of *P.O.V.* were untranslated from Danish into English, but later issues would feature English essays and translations. *P.O.V.* was not a major film journal by any means – in fact it was quite obscure – but in the history of short film studies it is an important text because one-half of its issues were devoted to short fiction films. This was, and is, an unprecedented amount of attention devoted to the form. Raskin wrote many articles, and the journal continued and built upon the template of close study in Marcus's *Short Story/Short Film* by including a variety of materials, such as interviews, scripts, stills, shot descriptions, and critical writing.



Raskin's 2002 book, *The Art of the Short Fiction Film*, made a large contribution to scholarship on the short film. Conceived as a "poetics" of the short film in the mode of David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), the project of the book is twofold: first, to clearly distinguish between the short fiction film and the experimental short; and second, to describe several parameters for story design in the short fiction film – in brief, to illuminate *how* short films tell stories. Raskin argues that "the short fiction film is pure *story cinema*, in that every image is in the service of a coherent and intelligible story, while the experimental short is *image cinema*, in the sense that images are given primacy over story, and narrative conventions are deliberately defied to the point that the viewer must never be able to make sense of the film" (3-4). This seems like a strict binary with little room for any in-between, and Raskin concedes that some films may straddle story and experimentation, and that a short may be "experimental" in the sense that it explores or invents new narrative pathways, but does so while remaining focused on telling a coherent story that the viewer can understand" (4). Indeed, many short films do straddle "pure story" and "experimental" strategies, but for Raskin and the purposes of this study, short films that primarily tell a story are central.

As he identifies the storytelling strategies of short films, Raskin organizes those strategies into seven parameters, "each with two properties that balance and complete one another" (165). This model is as prescriptive as descriptive, because Raskin argues that "when both components of a parameter are fully present in a short, their interplay shapes and enriches the film. When only one is present, or when they are out of balance, or there is no real interplay between the two, the film is not fully exploiting its storytelling potential" (165). The seven parameters each contain two strategies, with each film using one or both in some kind of balance. They are: 1. Character-Focus <-> Character Interaction; 2. Causality <-> Choice; 3. Consistency <->

Surprise; 4. Image <-> Sound; 5. Character <-> Object and Décor; 6. Simplicity <-> Depth; 7.

Economy <-> Wholeness (165-71). For Raskin, good short films will find a balance of many of these parameters, and he states that these properties were based on what he found in a “set of exemplary short fiction films, representing widely divergent types of story design” (171).

Raskin’s background as a film production instructor inspired him to find ways to help his students tell better stories with their short films, and his in-depth analyses of nine internationally acclaimed short films within *The Art of the Short Fiction Film* are an attempt to identify effective storytelling strategies in the short fiction format. The fact that those parameters might also apply to features is not discussed, nor the kinds of work that the short film performs. *The Art of the Short Fiction Film* is a key work on the poetics of this mode of filmmaking, and a long overdue book that looks at short films from a narratological perspective.

In order to do an in-depth study of short fiction films, regardless of approach, scholars must be able to access the films. Just as VHS and DVD changed and expanded the study of feature films, it is finally a bit easier to screen short fiction films from a number of sources. In 2005 Karl Mechem of the Ohio State University founded *The Journal of Short Film* which, according to its web site, is peer-reviewed, “modeled on the literary journal,” and attempts to “fill a hole in film distribution and create a new venue for the short film.” The journal does not contain critical essays on short films, but serves as a distribution venue and referee (the journal also includes short documentary and experimental films). The submitted films are subject to peer review by a panel of filmmakers and film scholars, and each quarter the journal distributes a DVD containing 90-120 minutes of short films. Anyone may submit a short film, and the publication’s panel of academics, filmmakers, and academic filmmakers determine which films receive distribution. This journal has artistic and academic ends in mind, not commercial

aspirations. Teachers, scholars, and subscribers are able to obtain, study, and make use of the shorts without attending festivals or endlessly sifting through YouTube.

*Short Film Studies*, a journal published by Intellect (Bristol, UK) and edited by Richard Raskin, is the newest addition to the study of the short film. Its format comes from earlier work by Marcus and Raskin in that several short films are selected for close study in each issue, with interviews and critical essays accompanying each film. This journal addresses a pressing need in film studies through its biannual publication. In an environment when short filmmaking worldwide greatly outnumbers feature filmmaking (and utterly dwarfs *widely distributed* feature films), it is the only academic journal in the discipline committed to short films. Some of the major journals may, from time to time, discuss a short (usually in passing) as it relates to a particularly significant filmmaker, but none of them devote consistent space or occasional special issues to short films. To put this in perspective, an equivalent scenario in literary studies would involve almost a complete oversight of short stories in every major literary journal and scholarly book. This is unthinkable, and though the disciplines are different, the near-exclusion of one of the basic modes of filmmaking from the academy is disturbing, considering many departments' ostensible commitments to elevating marginalized voices and texts and contesting hierarchies and inequalities in artistic representations.

Many critics of short fiction films argue that, on the whole, they are of a lower quality than features. This claim often fails to stand up to closer scrutiny, because many short films (especially within the last twenty years) are blessed with larger budgets than some features, granting filmmakers access to the best available equipment and filmmaking techniques. If the criticism is one of content, many short films explore ideas as complex and nuanced as the best features, if within a compressed amount of time. Rather, this prejudice seems to stem, again,

from the problem of access. Unlike canonical short stories, many of which were published in magazines and collected in books widely read by the public, the short film stopped receiving widespread distribution in the English-speaking world by the late 1950s. Because short films were, and are, more difficult to access, many of them were, and are, mistakenly considered unworthy of study. But the question of their distribution and exhibition has more to do with the economics of the various national film industries than it does the merit of any particular film.

Short films are rarely studied within a national or cultural context, and this remains a huge shortcoming. Many shorts play only at international festivals and sometimes only rarely in their home countries. Today, the proliferation of digital media, online streaming, and film schools in nearly every major, developed country contribute to this sense of a nation-less type of film. Yet, all films are made at certain times and in certain places, and to say that short films are born into an ephemeral international sphere with no claim to any point of origin or accompanying context rings false. Few scholars have thus far attempted to look closely at a broad range of a nation's short films, and fewer still pay as much attention to shorts' social, cultural, and political contexts.

### Functions of the Short Film

The short film is at a critical disadvantage due to prejudices built into the academy and popular judgment by the vicissitudes of industry and exhibition. Little time is spent on describing the *functions* of the short film, and its value as a mode of filmmaking. Indeed, what are the functions of the short film? Why is it important as a form of creative and cultural expression? How do we see these functions in the short fiction films of a nation like Scotland, which has historically had little to no national film industry? The following answers to these questions will

show that short films are an essential element of a nation's culture. Indeed they reveal ways a nation's people express and explore who they are and their lived experiences in a more immediate and local way than most features.

The history and case studies in the subsequent chapters will illustrate the functions of the short film listed and described below. These include industrial, cultural, and narrative functions, but are not limited to the following:

1. *Industry: Short fiction films train, develop, and nurture feature filmmakers.* Numerous filmmakers, including some of the world's most renowned, began their careers with shorts and only after (sometimes many) successful attempts did they make their first feature contributions. One good example is Roman Polanski, whose "Two Men and a Wardrobe" (1958) received not only international acclaim, but, according to Richard Raskin, changed the conceptions of what a short film could be just as all the Hollywood studios shut down their shorts departments. He argues, "The demise of the entertainment short produced for theatrical release, coupled with the emergence of new venues for showcasing shorts made by film school students and other aspiring auteurs, coincides with the birth of the narrative short as an art form in its own right, making 1958 the beginning of the modern era for the short fiction film" (30). That "Two Men and a Wardrobe" initiated "the birth of the narrative short as an art form in its own right" is dubious, but the significance of Polanski's film in launching his career is unquestioned. The French New Wave directors of the late 1950s, like Francois Truffaut, also directed successful short films before venturing into the world of features, and contemporary Scottish directors like Lynne Ramsay and David Mackenzie did the same in the 1990s.

Short films provide filmmakers with practice and a training ground for more ambitious and expensive projects, but this is not the primary work of the short fiction film, even if it is the

most obvious and cited characteristic of the form. Though the benefits of working on shorter projects may be seen in future, longer works, the idea that this is the chief purpose of the short reinforces its categorization as inferior to the feature, or at the very least a miniature version of it.

2. *Industry: Short films are used as a form of currency within filmmaking cultures and industries.* Closely related to function number one, Bevin Yeatman, writing in *P.O.V.* (5, 1998), argues that short films are a “form of currency in an economy of exchange – an exchange of influence and support, of kudos and opportunity.” He further states that this currency is

‘spent’ by various people in various roles (director, script writer, producer, magazine editor, politician, academic) to ‘finance’ their ongoing survival in their cultural games. I believe short film is shaped by the demands of these ploys and this economy of exchange is very influential in dictating what types of films are made and how they are valued. Many short films are not produced simply to be seen by the public - public viewing access in New Zealand is at best limited anyway - they are an investment used as a form of exchange to establish, maintain and develop strategic alignments in the film industry. Successful alignments result in the legitimization of certain types of films and this legitimization process develops through the discourses and structures that have been established in the film culture.

Writing in the context of the New Zealand film industry and culture, Yeatman focuses on what the short film does on an industrial level, rather than on a narrative one. Beyond practical training and experience, and aside from issues of representation, short films are used to advance and develop careers of all kinds of people involved in their making. Writing in 1998, before the production of *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) lured big-budget Hollywood movies to the Kiwi islands and expanded its film industry, Yeatman points out the significance of short filmmaking for New Zealanders attempting to penetrate the bigger Anglophone film industries. For many years, if a Kiwi filmmaker wanted to work on features, emigration to Hollywood or London was necessary, and in this way New Zealand’s filmmaking history is somewhat similar to Scotland’s, though its status as an autonomous state is a key difference.

Yeatman also points out the calling card function of short films. Short films are routinely screened at festivals, and filmmakers use those festivals' events and parties to network with other filmmakers and those with connections to various aspects of film industries. Whereas networking of this sort occurs with feature filmmakers, too, the short is more often a means to an end: feature film production. The calling card, for Yeatman, is the value of the short film. His article goes on to detail the mixed results of directors and crews as they go on to features, but the larger history of short filmmaking since at least the end of the 1950s supports Yeatman's claim about the short as a kind of filmmaking currency.

3. *Culture: Short films provide a space for women, minorities, and other marginalized filmmakers to express themselves within a motion picture medium.* If one function of the short fiction film is to train, develop, and nurture future feature filmmakers, another is to bring alternative voices to the art form. The difficulties of women and other minorities within mainstream film industries are well documented. For instance, from the 1940s-1960s, only Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner regularly directed films in Hollywood, and in Scotland it was not until 1992 that Margaret Tait became the first Scottish woman to direct a feature-length film with *Blue Black Permanent*. Even within the United Kingdom, Scottish feature filmmakers were rare. Without exception, until the 1970s, their best opportunities were located in London, Hollywood, or on corporate sponsored documentaries within Scotland. Additionally, Third Cinema and the various activist cinemas throughout postcolonial nations finally made room for oppressed people to direct feature-length films. The marginalization of women and minorities within the major world cinema industries is one of the direst consequences of the establishment of the feature program. Institutionalized and culturally pervasive sexism and racism eliminated the chances for many people to make features because of the films' expense and the business connections

necessary for exhibition and distribution. Short films, therefore, provided and still provide opportunities for a wider range of people from diverse backgrounds. While the transition from shorts to features is still difficult, short productions have always been a creative vehicle for othered filmmakers.

4. *Culture: Short films complicate and often contradict “official” national cinemas and representations.* This is one of the most crucial, and perhaps most overlooked, tasks of short films. Nearly all studies of national cinemas spotlight the feature-length film, mentioning the short in passing, if at all. The consequence of this is the potential misunderstanding of a nation’s film history. For example, “official” Scottish cinema from the 1930s-1960s was about the industrial documentary because that was the most well-financed and visible kind of filmmaking in Scotland at the time. Fictional filmmaking in or about Scotland during that time was created by film industries based in London or Hollywood. However, if we look at the short fiction films of Scotland during that period, we discover a wide variety of filmmaking, from experimental to animation to short fiction, by a range of filmmakers who seldom or never got a chance to direct features. These short films were made in Scotland by Scots, and often represented and dealt with contemporary experience in ways that documentaries financed by corporations did not. This will be a major topic in chapter two, which takes on the early decades of Scottish short filmmaking and the independent work of filmmakers like Margaret Tait and Enrico Coccozza. As we will see, corporate documentaries praised various Scottish industries, and Hollywood romanticized and mythologized Scotland, but until recent decades, few analyzed at the unofficial representations contained in Scottish short fiction films. In a following section, I more fully explain the needed revision of national cinema canons, and the implications and purposes of such a revision.



5. *Culture: As a cultural practice, short films are more akin to folk culture than the “official,” mainstream national cinema.* As the kind of filmmaking made by people on the fringes of, or totally disconnected from professional filmmaking, short filmmakers sometimes produce what might be thought of as a folk cinema. Amateur filmmaking takes on a wide variety of guises, from casual to serious, and Ian Craven argues that short, amateur filmmaking is a kind of compensation for the alienations of modernity: “a space to express abilities, fulfill potentials and identify a subjectivity” (8). As such, these films might be considerably more esoteric and individual than feature films, eschewing grand, national narratives or sweeping statements about social life.

Once again, a kinship exists between the functions of short films and short stories. Shaw articulates the differences between short stories and other forms of national literature, arguing that “while the epic is a national contribution to literature, and the ballad is a communal product, the short story, which in the last analysis proves to be the base of all our literature, excepting only the lyric and the critical essay, is distinctly an individual contribution” (66). The same might be said of the short film, with its individual concerns and limited exhibition; the feature is the “epic” and often considered the national contribution to world film history. However, filmmaking is a more communal product than many (especially certain kinds of auteurist critics and theorists) would like to admit, and amateur filmmaking sometimes even more so. The give and take between individual expression and communal effort is apparent in many amateur filmmaking groups and clubs that existed from the early twentieth-century up to recent years.

Whether the primary efforts of a single filmmaker or the work of a club, short films’ financially impoverished nature tend to place them within the sphere of folk culture. Additionally, many of these films were only seen locally and at amateur filmmaking

competitions. Precious few made broad festival runs or achieved wide distribution until the digital age, and even now, compared to mainstream productions, short films online do not achieve the kind of exposure of even low-budget features. Yet, even if the films are not widely distributed or exhibited, their production and exhibition may offer a sense of community and belonging to amateur filmmakers. Like playing in a bowling league, performing local music, or belonging to a volunteer organization, short filmmaking is often not just an expression of culture but also a way to form community ties. Like in folk music, the concerns of local life, local history, language and accents, and local concerns are revealed in short films because of their immediacy. There is less watering down of local culture in these films than in most mainstream features designed to appeal to a wide audience by creating a generic “local” culture.

6. *Narrative: Short films, by virtue of their brevity, emphasize the importance of moments.* In addition to the practical, industrial, and canonical work that short films may accomplish, particularities unique to this form of filmmaking and the ways it constructs narrative also perform significant work. By virtue of its brevity,<sup>5</sup> the impact of brief moments drive the narrative and force the viewer to absorb and ponder the significance of each particular beat. This contrasts with the feature, or epic film, which might include many significant moments in its plots and subplots. Viewers of feature or epic films may miss several moments and still gain an understanding of the film as a whole, but if a viewer of a short film misses even one key moment, the film may be misunderstood or its significance undermined. In his poetics of short films, Richard Raskin argues that short films require attentiveness to each moment and remind us that life is made up of many such instants. He observes that short films, because of their shortness,

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<sup>5</sup> A short film runs from 0-45 minutes according to many definitions; see Phillips, Raskin, Thurlow.

remind us that every moment is filled with opportunities that can either be seized or allowed to slip by... More than any other form of cinematic narrative, the short film heightens our sense of the preciousness and immediacy of the moment, both in the events portrayed and in the storytelling process. In both respects, the short fiction film demonstrates that every second can be made to count far more than we might otherwise expect, and implicitly reminds us never to underestimate how much meaningful and enriching experience can be encompassed by the briefest span of time (173).

This double emphasis on the importance of the moment, seen both in the brevity of the short film itself and in its narrative, encourages the viewer to contemplate the importance of every second, and perhaps implicitly reminds the viewer of the brevity of life itself. Indeed, the subject of many short films is how quickly life can change or be snuffed out, and that our conceptions of stability are illusions. While the brevity and transience of life may be themes explored in many features, the very succinctness of the short film best conveys those ideas.

*7. Narrative: Shorts often focus on the contemporary, everyday settings and the internal lives of their characters.* Due to relatively lower budgets than features, short films often use real locations instead of studio sets, and they prefer contemporary settings rather than period pieces. In several ways the short is often forced to engage with the local and the contemporary, if only out of economic necessity. Very often short films serve to make a point, or explore some aspect of, that contemporary and local setting. For instance, in the Scottish-Gaelic film “An Iobairt (The Sacrifice)” a woman comes to terms with her father’s possible suicide and the insurance money left to her by visiting a nearby Scottish island. She and her boyfriend discover human remains in the peat and learn about ancient Celtic human sacrifice rituals. A parallel is drawn between her father’s death for insurance money and the sacrifice of the ancient person which was intended to insure a future of plenty. An archaeologist in the film states that the sacrificed person would have known, and prepared himself for it, just as her father prepared himself for death and provided for his family with the insurance money. This film offers a contemporary vision of the Scottish

Islands, yet also argues that ancient practices and beliefs echo in the present. One constant that remains is the significance of interpersonal relationships and the desire for people to provide for their loved ones. A feature film exploring the same themes may have included elaborate period settings to recreate the ancient island culture and people, but financial and time restrictions force the film to emphasize the contemporary experience of loss and the past's impingement on the present.

Due to its concision, short films often focus on the inner life or lives of a single or very few characters. Here we find a parallel with some of the scholarly observations of prose short stories. Short story theorist Valerie Shaw points out that Henry James held a conviction that "the short story could mirror contemporary life and epitomize modern conditions" and that "the short story could reflect what was happening in society at large" (17). Short films, too, can be more autobiographical, critical, and incisive than feature films, which are often engineered to cater to market-targeted audiences and niches that will ensure profitable returns. Therefore, short fiction films need not follow a formulaic three-act structure, contain clear goals for their protagonists, or provide closure. This enables a short film to "mirror contemporary life" as it is experienced, in all its confusion, uncertainty, and banality. Again, with its focus on one or a few specific characters in contemporary, local settings, short films may counter or complicate official discourses of a national narrative, adding new pigments to a national cinema's palette.

8. *Narrative: Short films often focus on the liminal.* An astute filmgoer will notice that many short fiction films from a wide variety of countries feature more child, adolescent, young adult, and elderly protagonists than feature films. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Short films' shooting schedules are usually not long and demanding like features', making it easier to employ child actors because labor laws usually apply less (if at all) to short film productions.

Additionally, children, teenagers, and young adults are often less well-established actors, making them cheaper to hire. These practical conditions affect the kinds of stories told. Films featuring young people gravitate toward stories about coming of age, traumatic and confusing experiences, sexual awakenings, and other topics. Liminality becomes central because the chief characters are in-between childhood and adulthood, or at the least in a transition between innocence and experience.

The elderly appear more often in short fiction films than they do in features, as well. Many short films contemplate issues that affect those of advanced age, such as mortality, loneliness, finding a purpose in retirement, and relating to spouses and younger generations. In Scottish cinema, short films like “The Host” (Pat O’Neill, 1988) and “The Beauty of the Common Tool” (Owen Thomas, 1996) contain these themes.

Consistent casting of, and telling stories about, the young and old reveals that short fiction films, like short stories, are concerned with the liminal and the “frontiers” of experience. James Cooper Lawrence argues that

the short story writer often selects for attention an episode which pushes his major character on towards a boundary between the known and the unknown. Stories dealing with childhood frequently end with their principal character teetering on the brink of adulthood, and certainly in the case of writers who would be classified as realists it is usually more accurate to say that the concern is with adolescence, rather than childhood” (196).

Short films, like short stories, often have that moment, or build up to a moment, of revelation or instance of insight (193). In Lynne Ramsay’s “Small Deaths” (1996), the child protagonist is made aware of mortality and the cruelty of others, including the malice of other children. The “small deaths” of the title refer to the end of innocence regarding those matters. In “The Beauty of the Common Tool,” the elderly protagonist fully comes to realize his obsolescence as a skilled

laborer – a man who was a living tool engaged in productive labor before Scotland’s de-industrialization.

These films and these kinds of stories are often about small moments; people in transitional stages of life coming to large and small realizations in particular social and historical contexts. These are not the larger-than-life concerns of the epic film, or even most modest feature films. Master narratives do not hold much water here, as the focus of the story is often on confusing, difficult, or transitory moments and experiences that do not fit easily into a continuum. The short film is a space for the personal voice, and time and again that voice contemplates the liminal and the frontiers of adolescence, old age, and death.

The above discussion by no means exhausts the number of functions that the short film performs, nor does it fully detail its work as a form of cultural production. Indeed, no description of the functions of the short fiction film could be exhaustive because this mode of filmmaking varies considerably in terms of production contexts, production methods, reception, and more. Several of the functions listed and described here overlap to greater and lesser extents, and they reveal the entanglement of industry, practice, and culture.

### Revising National Cinema Canons

If we accept that the functions short films perform are important in terms of industry, culture, and narrative, then every country’s short films need closer looks. One problem is that the study of national cinemas, once considered stable and a staple of film studies, is now shifting terrain. Numerous books on national cinemas continue to be published, updating and revising histories of a particular nation-state’s films, but many other works in the last twenty-five years call the very concept of “national cinema” into question. National cinemas, then, as concepts, are

both perpetuated and revised (some might say attacked) at the same time. Whatever the approach, all suffer from the same blindness to the role short films play in any given national, transnational, or international cinema. Books that focus on discrete national cinemas tend to downplay, if not ignore, short films, and scholarship on transnational or international cinema tend to focus only on how feature films travel through various “mediascapes” and “technoscapes” (to use Arjun Appadurai’s terms), as well as how films fit in with various aspects of global capitalism today (32). Both kinds of work overlook the short film because of its low economic impact and relatively low visibility. As a result, this lowers the profile of, and limits the scholarly conversation regarding nations with impoverished film industries.

Discussions of national cinemas almost invariably focus on the question of the definition of the national while giving short shrift to the question of what counts as cinema. The overriding assumption of the scholarship is that the “cinema” of a nation refers to its feature-length fiction films (and sometimes documentaries), while even the short fiction films directed by a nation’s major filmmakers are barely mentioned. Questions of nation, transnationalism, and globalism tend to dominate discussions of national cinema, and because short films generally do not move in the fast lane of global exhibition or commerce, they remain ignored. Ryan Shand proposes an explanation of why, for example, British amateur short films are overlooked. His account might be applied more broadly to amateur short fiction filmmaking in many places:

Associations with the technically ‘substandard’ have certainly coloured aesthetic expectations of the mode; instinctive assimilations of amateurism with a range of socio-cultural conservativisms have implied little in the way of experimentalism and thus critical interest; the ‘personal’ dimensions of much amateur filmmaking have seemed to distance it from the ‘master’ narratives of history-proper, marking an essential inscrutability resistant to translation from elsewhere, etc. A particularly marginalizing role has also been played by emphasis upon the cultural geographies of the nation. Since developing from its primal formulations in the study of genre and authorship, the focus of Film Studies has often been on national cinemas, a paradigm proving remarkably resilient, even when re-worked by post-structuralism and its ‘trans-national’ and ‘cross-border’ variants. With its persistently local

representational emphases, demand for ‘local knowledge’ and assertion of very local ‘priorities’, amateur cinema has seemed to fall beyond the scope of this crucial paradigm at a series of levels (156).

Shand lists many of the common criticisms made against short fiction films: technically poor, not experimental enough to warrant critical interest, and too local and impenetrable to make a wide impression or contribute to discussions of a national cinema. Furthermore, he argues that amateur, short fiction films do not engage with the local as strongly as short documentaries, which often display location and local culture. Short fiction films, then, for Shand, occupy a strange place that is not part of a “‘master’ narrative,” but also their “disembedded localism” means that the locations usually only serve as narrative backdrop and the films could have been made anywhere. Indeed, as Shand later points out, many of the cinema clubs like the Edinburgh Cine Society hoped that their short fiction films would travel beyond their cities or regions of origin (178). In this schema, short fiction films neither belong to their nation’s cinema (and neither to transnational or global cinemas, it seems), nor their local origins because of aspirations for wider exhibition.

I disagree with Shand’s stance. This perspective punishes the short fiction film for its attempts to tell stories, arguing that narrative mostly negates the local and the national. While short fiction films’ stories may not center on locality and aspects of local culture in ways that short documentaries do, fictional feature-length films rarely suffer these kinds of criticisms. Short fiction films, even if they aim for a global audience, do contain artifacts of the local and the national, such as accents, locations, and cultural practices. In fact, this may be even more strongly the case for shorts than with features, because features often employ elaborate measures of hiding or manipulating location and draw from complicated and international funding. The fact that short fiction films remain outside of the canon of national cinemas is a bit disturbing,



even as studies of national, transnational, and global cinemas proliferate, suggesting that newer and more inclusive studies of world cinemas may not be as inclusive as they could be.

Most books on national cinemas and national cinematic movements do not give much attention to the short film. This is understandable because it is a monumental task to account for a whole nation's film history in a single volume. Particularly attentive authors acknowledge the short film, even if they do not discuss it at length. One example is Michel Marie's book on the French New Wave, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* (Blackwell, 2003), which briefly discusses the short films directed by New Wave directors. In describing French short film producer Pierre Braunberger's contribution to the French New Wave, Marie recounts that

He [Braunberger] also backed Agnes Varda's *O Saisons, O chateaux* (*Of Seasons and Chateaux*, 1956), followed by *Les Surmenes* (*The Overworked*) by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (*All the Boys are Called Patrick*) by Godard, based on a script by Eric Rohmer, their *Charlotte et son Jules* (*Charlotte and her Jules*), and Truffaut and Godard's *Histoire d'eau* (*A Story of Water*). Thus, Braunberger is a producer who helped pave the way for the movement's appearance via his catalogue of short films. Yet, as we have emphasized, from the point of view of producers and even more the public, the realm of feature fiction films remains decisive since it is much more important in terms of the institutional "visibility" and any hopes of financial returns (62-63, brackets mine).

Marie at least mentions the short films and Braunberger's contributions, and readers will note that the list of directors in the previous quote reads as a "who's who" of French National Cinema. This book, and others like it, do not extensively analyze the importance of these short films to the careers of future directors of French cinema. Nor does it account for, or describe, how exactly the embryonic characteristics of the New Wave were found (or, how Braunberger helped "pave the way") within those same short films, clearly influencing the feature-length work in terms of themes and filmmaking techniques. The short films of the 1950s incubated the French New Wave, and without them it is unlikely that it would have taken shape as it did, much to the impoverishment of French National Cinema and global film history.

Examples abound of recent books on national cinemas that do not cover the short film at length. Susan Hayward's epic take on French cinema in *French National Cinema* acknowledges short fiction films (as well as documentaries and short animated films), but emphasizes questions of the representations in, and production histories of, feature films. In her preface, she states that, "There is insufficient space in a book of this length" to include shorts, among other forms, but studies of such are worthwhile – just not in this particular volume (xi). Intellect Publishing's recent *Directory of World Cinema* series, which features several edited collections devoted to a particular national cinema, offers an impressive number of studies of national cinemas with reviews and essays on diverse bodies of films. Entries in the series include: *Directory of World Cinema: Russia* (ed. Birgit Beumers, 2011), *Directory of World Cinema: Japan* (ed. John Berra, 2013), *Directory of World Cinema: Iran* (ed. Parviz Jahed, 2012), and many more. However, volumes in the series do not include reviews of, or essays on, short films. The format of these books favors essays on important individual filmmakers, genres, and various aspects of a nation's film industry, history, and/or exhibition. Fortunately, Felando's recent book discusses the production and stylistic influences of short films like "The Red Balloon" (Albert Lamorisse, 1956) and Jacques Rivette's "The Fool's Mate" (1956) on the European art cinemas of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the French New Wave (107-113).

Even though there is a continuous output of books on specific national cinemas, the concept of the national cinema as a stable, fixed entity broke down as the twentieth-century ended. Unfortunately, this breakdown has done little for the study of short films. Many authors emphasize and acknowledge the fluid and changing conceptions of the nation, like Susan Hayward in her aforementioned book:

although this textualisation of the nation reinforces the popular myth of cultural specificity (and, thereby, of difference), that specificity will necessarily change over the

course of history. It will change because the signification of the term ‘national’ changes according to political, social and economic pressures and mutations, just as the state of the nation changes in time according to its position in the world (16).

Though the concepts of nation and nationhood (and national cinemas) have changed, the objects of film study are generally not expanded beyond feature-length films. Nonetheless, new concepts and frameworks like “transnational” and “global” cinema better account for alternative representations and how feature films move globally in the present day.

Numerous books on cinema and nation published in the twenty-first century attempt to revise old concepts of national cinemas and explain new frameworks of production, exhibition, distribution, and global flows of culture. This scholarship illuminates current issues of cinema and nation, yet too few engage with short films and the work they do in producing and expressing national cinemas. That is one part of the work of this dissertation. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie’s edited volume, *Cinema & Nation*, calls for a reassessment of the definition of national cinemas. They document early work done by Kracauer on German Cinema in *From Caligari to Hitler*, and contend that for several decades, “national cinemas were by and large organized in terms of a literary conception of ‘great works’” with Ingmar Bergman as the keystone of Swedish Cinema, Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut the same for French Cinema, and so on (3). They point out that in the 1970s and 1980s, structuralism (and post-structuralism), Lacanian psychoanalysis, and feminism problematized the idea of the “national,” but “national cinema” was “retained as a descriptive category” (3). They point to Crofts’s 1998 book, *Concepts of National Cinema*, which “contends that national cinemas are best analysed in terms of the following kinds of categories: ‘production’, ‘audiences’, ‘discourses’, ‘textuality’, ‘national-cultural specificity’, ‘the cultural specificity of genres and nation-state cinema movements’, ‘the role of the state’ and ‘the global range of nation-state cinemas’” (3-4). Hjort

and Mackenzie sum up the contributions to their collection by pointing out that “Films, it is claimed, do not simply represent or express the stable features of a national culture, but are themselves one of the loci of debates about a nation’s governing principles, goals, heritage and history” (4). This seems reasonable, and it certainly makes a more accurate assessment of film’s place within national cultures. Yet, the question of which kinds of films are privileged to be the “loci of debates” is not explored, perhaps because the answer is obvious from the examples within the collection: the feature length fictional film.

The concept of national cinema is not totally abandoned, even if it is destabilized. Early in Alan Williams’s edited volume, *Film and Nationalism*, he argues against the trend for scholars to downplay the national: “we should be wary of letting it lead us to conclude that there is such a thing as a ‘national cinema’. We might do better to think about national cinemas in the way that Rick Altman proposes that we study film genres- as sites of conflict among different interest groups (and film scholars are simply one interest group among many)” (5). One could also argue that different classes of films and filmmakers also make up the “different interest groups.” The short film is not mentioned as a site of conflict or as a challenge to the hegemony of the feature. Many of the new theories of national cinemas respond to various aspects of Hollywood’s domination, which seems to color all discussions of the makeup of national cinemas. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden observe that “It’s now impossible of maintaining a strict dichotomy between Hollywood cinema and its ‘others’... hybridizing tendencies have become predominant” (2). They further contend that the implications of this are numerous: “hybridity also problematizes the term ‘foreign film’...It is distributed by the ‘art house circuit’ and this serves to reinforce the notion that U.S. cinema is the site of entertainment, while other cinemas are sites of edification or instruction” (2-3). As we saw earlier in this chapter, the feature

program became the hegemonic format of filmmaking and exhibition, and once that was established, the worldwide success of Hollywood forced many other cinemas to define themselves in opposition or in relation to it. For Ezra and Rowden, hybridization causes some positive outcomes. For instance, the proliferation of film festivals are alternate means of distribution and exhibition. This adds to what they call “cine-literacy.” New festivals, distribution, and exhibition may also work to counter pernicious forms of nationalism

because narrative film as a dramatic medium relies largely on emotional identification to do its work, the sense of familiarity with other cultures and with the natives of those cultures as people worthy of two or three hours of intense emotional investment that a given cinematic text demands weakens the ability of cultural authorities to deploy the binarized us/them narratives upon which xenophobic nationalisms depend (4).

Short films occupy a central place in many, if not most, major and minor film festivals throughout the world, but rarely are they talked about as “hybridized,” or in service to productive conversations about the local and the national.

If the fictional feature film is the most significant filmic enunciation of the nation (or transnational or global cinema), what could be said if a nation’s film history produced few, or no, feature length films? Does this mean that it has no national cinema? If a nation’s cinema is limited to documentaries and/or external representations of itself and its people, does that mean it has no filmic voice? Many nations and states produce few fictional feature films. This is the case for much of Scotland’s film history, and for decades many thought it had no fiction cinema of its own – only commissioned documentaries and feature productions originating in London and Hollywood. However, this is based on a narrow definition of “cinema” or “national cinema,” and if one includes the short films of Scotland over the course of several decades, we see that there was indeed an indigenous fiction cinema, just not the kind widely recognized by the industry and the academy.

The struggles of the short films of Scotland for recognition are in part due to Scotland's junior status as a nation within the state of the UK, and for much of film history, as part of the British Empire. The ways Scotland and Scottishness are staged in film (to use Vitali and Willemsen's term in *Theorising National Cinema*) and evolve are subject to contingencies of the British film industry, politics, and changes in culture. Indeed, short filmmaking in Scotland exemplifies the argument made by Vitali and Willemsen that "culture, like history, is not a linear, monologic process of containment, but an unstable terrain that is always contended over by the dominant and the non-dominant socio-economic forces at play in specific national formations" (7). Short filmmaking in Scotland, is and has been, a non-dominant cultural activity, but its intersections and interactions with dominant state and economic forces reveal ways it constructs Scotland and Scottishness often at odds, or alternative to, dominant representations and dominant economic and state forces. Using Jurgen Habermas's analyses of contemporary public and private spheres within a Marxist framework, Vitali and Willemsen contend that

cinema can be thought of as pertaining to a national configuration because films, far from offering cinematic accounts of 'the nation' as seen by the coalition that sustains the forces of capital within any given nation, are clusters of historically specific cultural forms the semantic modulations of which are orchestrated and contended over by each of the forces at play in a given geographical territory. The functioning of cinema as an industry and a cultural practice in any of these territories is overdetermined by the institutions of the state – from censorship through to taxation and real estate policies – but the economic forces sustaining any given film do not necessarily mobilize the available narrative stock in the directions preferred by the state. In other words, films may and may not reflect the ideological trajectory dominant within the nation at any one time (7)

Though Vitali and Willemsen do not refer specifically to short films, the following chapters will show some of the contentions and "forces at play" within Scottish films and filmmaking. Some of these in the Scottish context include independent amateur filmmakers working outside of any organization or government agency; filmmaking clubs and groups; the National Film and

Television School (and later the Scottish Screen Academy); public funding bodies and organizations like Tartan Shorts and Ghear Ghearr; and television entities like the BBC and Channel 4. While Scotland is not necessarily a post-colonial nation, it is, at present, a stateless nation within the United Kingdom with a long and mostly ignored or forgotten tradition of indigenous, short filmmaking. Scottish filmmakers have long been forced to overcome considerable obstacles in pursuit of making films, yet their accomplishments are impressive given their junior status and circumstances throughout the last eighty-plus years.

In some respects, short fiction films receive more attention at present than ever before in the spheres of film festivals, television, and the Internet. At the same time, the divorcement of national, social, cultural, and political contexts from the studies of individual short films remains a shortcoming. Whereas scholars routinely place feature films – even whole genres of features spanning decades – within these contexts, studies of the short film up to this point fail to do so. The over-emphasis on narratology within studies of short films too often ignores the social and historical moments that produced those films. Again, this may be due to the nature of short fiction films' exhibition post-1960. Many shorts play only at international festivals and sometimes only rarely in their home countries. Today, the proliferation of digital media, online streaming, and film schools in nearly every major, developed country (often populated by international students) contribute to this sense of a nation-less film. Yet, all films are made at certain times and in certain places, and to say that short films are born into an ephemeral international sphere with no claim to any point of origin or accompanying context rings false. Few scholars have thus far attempted to look closely and exclusively at a broad range of a nation's short films, and fewer still pay as much attention to shorts' social, cultural, and political contexts as narrative strategies.

The canons of national, international, and global cinemas, however those terms are defined, must be revised to include short films. The vast majority of all fiction filmmaking takes place within a short format, and it is in this format that the widest range of filmmakers and voices reside. Most world cinema was and is dominated by male filmmakers, but shorts provided (and still provide) a venue for female filmmakers, and any filmmaker not yet on the inside of the “business” of any particular country. Not only do we find the diversity of short filmmakers in terms of gender and ethnicity, but geographical origin, as well. For instance, “British” cinema is often London-centric, providing a view of the United Kingdom as limited to the nation’s major metropolis, reflecting its priorities and ideas of what it means to be British. But, if we look at the shorts of Scotland, the same United Kingdom is seen very differently when it comes from Edinburgh or Orkney. Stories abound from places other than the major metropolitan and filmmaking centers – places rarely transposed to the big screen. In the United States, for instance, a huge number of features set and filmed in Los Angeles and New York belie the size and diversity of even the U.S., the world’s most profitable film producing nation. This produces an oversimplified view of the country, as if there were no (or very few) stories to be told about, or within, places like Nebraska, Wyoming, or Wisconsin. Scholars need to look beyond the feature fiction films produced in the major filmmaking metropolises, if only for a broader and more inclusive picture of cinema itself.

### Scottish Short Films

Scottish cinema, and especially its short fiction film corpus, may be thought of as an “underdog” cinema, and short films may be thought of as a form of expression for the underdog, generally. Short fiction films are an impoverished cinema, yet they often anticipate trends that



appear in later features. Shorts present to the audience and the scholar ways non-professionals create fictions, and since there is less financially at stake, these fictions are free to challenge official representations and narratives. Often, they do not, and the context and purpose of each film must be considered. Regardless of their origin, they are usually on the periphery of film art in that country.

Scotland is and has been “a site of cinematic interest since the beginnings of film-making” (Barrett, 2015, 11). From the silent short “The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots” (Alfred Clark, 1895) to early color film stock tests of tartan cloth, to *Outlander* on Starz (2014-present), filmic fascinations with Scottish history and culture have been ever-present. These productions are representations and images of Scots and Scottishness, made by both by Scots and outsiders, for Scots and others. As Nowlan writes,

these images and stories in turn exert immense impact – and exercise immense power. Imaginations of Scotland and Scottishness exercise enormous, real effects, over what people think, feel, believe and do in ‘real life’. The same is true of myths – *these are myths people live by*, and which continually turn to and draw upon in seeking to make sense of their own experience, and that of others both (seemingly) similar to and different from themselves, both (seemingly) close to and distant from themselves, and both (seemingly) related to and unrelated to themselves (2015, 7).

Scottish cinema studies, as a study of a national cinema, is relatively new compared to the study of British cinema at large, and in comparison to studies of other small nations. As such, fictional feature films created by Hollywood and London have received far more attention, as have many of the documentaries about Scotland and its industries – the dominant form of professional filmmaking by Scots in Scotland for decades. The ways short fiction films created by Scots throughout the twentieth-century and beyond have imagined and re-imagined Scotland and Scottishness is one significant area in need of examination. This is more evident today, in the wake of the Independence Referendum of September, 2014, when “such work of national re-

imagination and re-invention has become immediately relevant, and even urgent, throughout Scotland” (Nowlan, 8). This project aims to identify and assess the work of short films, within Scottish film industries, culture, and beyond, in imagining and re-imagining Scotland and Scottishness.

Scotland occupies a complicated position within the UK, and its filmmaking does, too. Throughout its history, Scotland experienced some colonial actions but not the same in all regions, and not exactly in the same ways as much of the Global South. For instance, in the wake of the Battle of Culloden in 1746, the Highland Clearances by English military forces destroyed much of the clan culture in northern Scotland, and largely depopulated the region. At the same time, by the next century, Glasgow became a major industrial center, and was regarded as the Empire’s second city. Many Scots made fortunes in the New World, taking advantage of British military, economic, and colonial power. However, without overstating the colonial case, Scotland remained a junior partner within the British Empire. The Scots’ continued diverging political and social values from England with regard to Brexit and Scottish independence help make the case for Scotland as something of an underdog nation without a state.

Given this history, it is problematic to label the Scots, as a whole, a Celtic subaltern people. At the same time, it may be useful to think of their short fiction films in terms of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of minor literature. Though Deleuze and Guattari write of minority populations’ literary products written in the language of the majority or dominant group, amateur short filmmaking shares many characteristics with minor literature. If, in filmmaking terms, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “literature of masters” is the dominant, mainstream filmmaking of London and Hollywood, minor literature (in this case the short film) put the masters’ language to “strange and minor uses” (16-17). These could include

emphases on women and minority characters, liminal phases of life, and open-ended or fragmented narratives – in short, subjects and narrative forms that “works upon the remains of the dominant culture” (Awadalla and March-Russell, 5). However, filmmaking is complicated, and not all short fiction films from Scotland fit neatly into a major-minor or insider-outsider binary. In many cases, short fiction films are viewed by their creators as vehicles to enter the dominant or mainstream industries that the form sometimes subverts. Also, within short filmmaking in Scotland (especially by the 1990s) and elsewhere, larger budgets and access to television and festival exhibitions create hierarchies within short filmmaking practices. Better funded and better equipped short filmmakers tend to create films that far more closely resemble the products of the mainstream, Hollywood industry in terms of production values, complete character arcs, and three-act structures with closed endings. On the other hand, this is not always the case, and the ways in which the practices and purposes of short filmmaking affect and reflect something about the national and cultural context serve as the main part of this study.

Scotland is one case study on the work of short fiction films within in the realm of national cinemas. Scotland is an underdog nation – distinct, yet a junior partner within the UK, and short films are a lesser-than form of filmmaking. The following chapters intend to tell the stories of films made by those working mostly outside the industry. The analyses of the films will show the specific ways these films perform the functions of short films mentioned above, and their value to Scottish culture and a sense of a distinct Scottish cinema and nation.

### Chapter III: Short Film Traditions 1930-1979

This chapter tells the story of Scottish short fiction films spanning a nearly five-decade period. The films examined in this chapter are set within historical and cultural contexts, and their relationships to the dominant cinemas of the UK and Hollywood loom large. As each film is examined in turn, it is divided into sections entitled Production Information and Context, Plot Summary, and Analysis. This division is a variation on the format for short film analysis that Marcus and Raskin created in their works. Plot summaries are necessary because most, if not all, of the films are obscure. Each analysis will explain how the film performs some or all of the functions detailed in chapter one, and how the film contributed to Scottish cinema. In this era, students, women, socialists, first-generation Scots, and working class artists made vital contributions to a film culture all Scotland's own.

#### Early Filmmaking in Scotland

Films made in and about Scotland and Scottish subjects found their way to screens and audiences from the earliest days of cinema. Fiction films made in Scotland, by Scots themselves, however, often traveled a winding and difficult path because of London's central place in the UK film industry.

As Scottish cinema scholar Duncan Petrie points out, by the late 1910s narrative fiction dominated the interests of movie-goers and filmmakers in the United Kingdom (2000, 18). This was true in Scotland, and early Scottish fiction features include *The Harp King* (Max Leder, 1919), a romance about a farmer who "wins the hand of the laird's daughter by his skilful playing of the harp" (Petrie, 18), *Mairi – the Romance of a Highland Maiden* (Andrew Patterson, 1912), and Harry Lauder's 1920 films *All For the Sake of Mary* and *I Love a Lassie* (19). However, most early film equipment manufacturers were based in London, and Petrie points out

that by 1914 “economic pressures had resulted in the greater concentration of film production in the south-east” (17).

The centrality of the London film industry was established early on, putting filmmaking Scots at something of a disadvantage, and setting up the context for short filmmaking culture out economic and practical necessity. This occurred in spite of the fact that Scots were and are among the UK’s most avid cinema lovers. By 1920, four of the top twelve “cinema circuits” (what we would refer to today as theater chains) in the UK were “owned and controlled” by Scots (16). John Caughie notes that by 1920, there were 500 cinemas in Scotland and by that time over 150 films produced throughout the world contained Scottish subjects such as Bonnie Prince Charlie, Rob Roy, Annie Laurie and others (Early cinema in Scotland). Indigenous producers in the early years of cinema also began to make films, often short non-fiction films that they also exhibited and toured. One example of this is William Walker’s film of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee procession, shot in 1897, which supplemented his magic lantern shows based in Aberdeen (Petrie, 17). Some exhibitors hired out amateur filmmakers to document local events, and production companies like Scottish Film Productions of Glasgow, and Campbell Harper Films of Edinburgh, began to spring up.

However, the establishment of London as the base for the mainstream UK film industry meant that any Scottish filmmaker attempting to make it in the mainstream industry was obliged to journey to the south of England to pursue a career. Even though cinema was extremely popular in Scotland, only six feature films were made there between 1915 and 1930. Short fiction filmmaking was somewhat more prevalent, but few of the films made before 1930 survive. Currently, the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive in Glasgow

possesses only eight fictional short films made from 1890-1930. A few others may have survived, but many more are lost forever (National Library of Scotland).

By the 1930s, two dominant filmmaking trends emerged in the mainstream London and Hollywood industries with respect to films set in, and/or about, Scotland and its people. The first was the sponsored documentary, heavily influenced by the guiding hand of John Grierson (a Scot, and considered by many the father of the modern documentary), and second were fictional feature films rooted in the tropes of Tartanry and Kailyard.

Many British documentaries in the 1930s were educational and nationalistic, firmly enfolding Scotland within the British Empire. The 1938 Films of Scotland Committee-sponsored Empire Exhibition series provide some of the best illustrations of this tradition. As Bob Nowlan writes, the Empire Exhibition series was staged in Glasgow's Bellahouston Park and ran from May through October, and it was the "last extensive peacetime public showcase of the prowess of the British Empire" (328). Grierson supervised this exhibition, and seven documentaries showcased Glasgow's and Scotland's contemporary contributions to the British Empire. Each film focused on a particular aspect of Scottish life and/or industry, from education to agriculture to sport. Nowlan observes that, "The series depicts Scotland as a single, united nation sharing a common national character, and committed toward a common national purpose" and that the films show "little to no evidence of social division and conflict, or of competing interest and need" (329-30). For instance, the film *Wealth of a Nation* "does admit the tremendous impact of the Great Depression on the Scottish economy, as well as the accumulation of serious problems in traditional Scottish urban working-class tenement housing, but quickly counters that admission" (330). It does so by arguing that the benevolent British government has intervened and is highly responsive to pressure from Scottish citizens (330).

This documentary series attempted to alter the correct impression that the Scots suffered worse than the rest of the UK during World War I and the Depression. Indeed, as historian T.M. Devine reports, “By 1931, Scottish industrial production was less than the level achieved in 1913; over 26 per cent of the insured workforce was idle, almost double the English average; and 100,000 men were reckoned to be ‘permanently surplus’ to working requirements” (318). Though some in Scotland prospered during the interwar years, Scotland was hit harder by the Depression than the rest of the UK by most economic measures, including Gross Domestic Product, which averaged 2.2 percent growth for the whole of the UK from 1924-1937, but Scotland’s during the same years was 0.4 percent, and averaged -2.0 percent from 1928-1932 (318). Thus, one of the two dominant filmmaking trends in and about Scotland at this time attempted to both alleviate the worries of the average Scottish citizen, while at the same time re-affirming Scotland’s steadfast place within a (declining) British Empire on the eve of World War II. Many complexities, conflicts, differences, and challenges<sup>6</sup> that faced Scotland were whitewashed by the British-government sponsored documentaries in order to perpetuate images of Scotland as a unified partner within the UK. If the complex realities of Scottish life in the 1930s were avoided by the grand narrative of mainstream documentary, mainstream fiction looked to myth and fantasy.

The fiction films in the early sound era often took their cues from literature of the nineteenth-century, and perpetuated myths of Scots and Scottishness like the Tartanry of the romantic Highland warrior. The tropes and discourse of Tartanry draws inspiration from the Jacobite uprisings of the eighteenth-centuries, and clan culture. Its iconography includes kilts, bagpipes, and claymores. Also, the literature of the Kailyard, or “cabbage patch,” perpetuates a

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<sup>6</sup> The formation of the National Party of Scotland in 1928 is one example of these challenges. By 1934 the National Party of Scotland became the Scottish National Party and was totally devoted to home rule.

nostalgic, rural ideal of Scotland as full of backward and canny peasants, and provides the second set of inspirations for fictional representations of Scots and Scottishness. Tartanry and Kailyard remain influential and visible today in films and television shows like *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995), *Monarch of the Glen* (2000-2005), and *Outlander* (2014-present). Throughout film history, and certainly in the 1930s, these brands of Scottish fictions dominated and provided limited views of Scots and Scotland. Critics often contend that Tartanry and Kailyard remain potent in the wake of the defeat at Culloden in 1746, in which Scotland decisively lost its best chance to be an independent country. The ensuing Highland Clearances and Scotland's post-1746 place in the British Empire caused a nostalgia for a lost time and place. Together, Tartanry and Kailyard place Scots firmly in the past; they are an invisible people with a romantic history but no present or future. These two trends, the national documentary and mythic fictions opened a gap for the short film's ability to deftly deal with the small, personal contemporary experience and alternative fictions that do not fit neatly into a master national narrative.

The overwhelming number of Tartan and Kailyard representations in film provided fodder for many critics writing in the 1980s and later, like Colin McArthur and Tom Nairn, in their attacks on these filmic traditions. More recently, though, scholar Ian Brown reassessed Tartanry as "polysemic and multivalent." (2). Nowlan synthesizes recent arguments that reassess Tartanry when he writes that "tartan imagery and iconography are not artificial inventions of the late eighteenth century, imposed upon the Scottish nation and its people by the likes of Sir Walter Scott and James MacPherson, but rather maintain deep roots in Scottish cultural life, including across Lowland as well as Highland Scotland, dating as far back as the eleventh century" (95). In the early sound era of filmmaking and for several decades thereafter, however,



Tartan and Kailyard images of Scotland were virtually the *only* kinds of fictional renderings of the Scottish nation and its people. According to mainstream filmmaking in the 1930s, Scots are a people rooted in a mythic past and their modern place is as a unified and tightly-fitting cog in the well-oiled machine that was the British Empire. Nuanced, contemporary, and urban Scottish experiences were absent from the mainstream silver screen at this time, but present in short films, as we will see later in this chapter.

While Hollywood and London may have had the “official” word on representation of Scots and Scottishness during the 1930s, it was not the only word. At this time, alternative filmmaking traditions led by amateurs and aspiring professionals emerged. The Workers’ Film Societies fostered one of these alternate traditions by engaging in socialist, counter-culture screenings and, eventually, their own brand of filmmaking. According to Douglas Allen, socialist counter-culture “took the form of a network of clubs and institutions engaging in drama, literature, music, field sports, swimming and even rambling – all in the name of socialism. One important component of this counter-culture from the late twenties was the cinema” (93). The Workers’ Film Society in Scotland began by screening prints of banned Soviet films, and had branches in Edinburgh, Dundee, St. Andrews, and Glasgow (94). The societies arranged screenings in working-class neighborhoods, and the Glasgow Kino Group in particular used the film screenings to agitate and “back up political public meetings” (94). Socialist films from across the world were screened by the film societies and clubs in many countries throughout Europe, and many of the societies’ constitutions (like the following from the Edinburgh Workers’ Progressive Film Society) included goals “...to encourage the production of films of value to the working class’ (EWPFs)” (Allen, 95). Most of the Scottish groups failed to meet the

objectives of socialist film production, but those that did produced striking films that continue to resonate.

The Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar short film, “Hell Unltd,” provides a striking example of an alternative to the Griersonian and patriotic documentaries, as well as feature fiction films that wallowed in Tartan and Kailyard tropes. This film, directed by native Scots working within the socialist Edinburgh Kino Group, incisively attacks the arms industry (which, interestingly, boosted the economy of Scotland through increased industrial production), militarism, and nationalism of the late 1930s. Of all the films – feature, short, and documentary – made during this decade in the UK, “Hell Unltd,” is one of the most prescient and poignant, as it reminds the viewer of the true costs of war, even as many nations were barreling toward World War II.

**“Hell Unltd”** directed by Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar

1936, 19 minutes, Black and White, Silent

Principal Production Credits

Directors: Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar

Producers: Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar

*Production Information and Context:* This remarkable short film is, in part, a product of the trauma of World War I. Scots suffered disproportionately more than the rest of the UK during World War I and the Great Depression that followed it. Devine writes that “Of the 557,000 Scots who enlisted in all services, 26.4 per cent lost their lives. This compares with an average death rate of 11.8 per cent for the rest of the British army between 1914 and 1918. Of all the combatant nations, only the Serbs and the Turks had higher per capita mortality rates” (309).

Devine also points out that “trade unions and most workers” in Scotland supported the war and united with the government against Germany; only a few socialists were against military action (309). However, during the war, labor unrest and work demonstrations rose, climaxing in “a mass demonstration of 100,000 people in Glasgow’s George Square” in January 1919 (Devine, 314). 12,000 government troops with tanks and machine guns were sent and stationed in what amounted to an occupation of Glasgow (Devine 314-15). The middle classes fervently opposed communism, but the 1920s saw the establishment of “municipal cinemas” for screening communist films (MacPherson, 2015, 33). John MacLean was instrumental in doing so in Glasgow, and he even served as the Bolshevik government’s representative in Scotland (MacPherson, 2015, 33). By the mid-1930s, a generation of young filmmakers were raised on Soviet classics by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and other socialist and communist films. A creative stew that drew from the trauma of World War I, “Industrial depression, mass unemployment, hunger marches,” and socialist and communist films, led to an original and angry film by two talented Scottish leftists (Devine, 316).

According to Douglas Allen, “Hell Unltd” was a fruit born of the Glasgow Kino Group and the Glasgow School of Art. In the 1930s, the Glasgow Kino group was one of the many Workers’ Film Societies mentioned above, and in the middle of the decade it recruited two remarkable talents from the Glasgow School of Art, Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar. Allen states that “Their award-winning amateur films had established for them a local reputation as experimental film-makers of note; and their growing politicism through the thirties was giving their films and scripts for proposed films an increasingly hard edge” (95). “Hell Unltd” was the culmination of a partnership between two young and rising Scottish talents, and their increasingly socialist, anti-fascist, and pacifist sensibilities.

“Hell Unltd” blends filmmaking modes and strategies in order to achieve its pacifist goals. Allen notes that “Hell Unlimited” rebuffs “documentary realism in favor of a montage of fantasy, surrealism, animation and agit-prop” (96). As will be described in more detail below, even a cursory viewing of this film leads the viewer to conclude that its hybridity defies genre. It is fiction, experimental, animation, and documentary. Therefore, not only does it rebel against the mainstream British political thought of its era, but it also rebels against the dominant Scottish film forms of the time: the Griersonian documentary and Tartan and Kailyard fiction filmmaking.

Unfortunately, the McLaren-Biggar team-up did not last long. Recognizing McLaren’s talent, John Grierson lured him to London to join the GPO Film Unit in London shortly after the release and success of “Hell Unltd.” McLaren eventually migrated to Canada where Grierson put him to work for the National Film Board. There he opened an animation studio and trained Canadian animators. His innovative animated films are still considered pioneering and experimental, and “Hell Unltd” is one of his key early works.

Helen Biggar, on the other hand, stayed in Scotland and did not enjoy a prolific filmmaking career. After “Hell Unltd” she made one other film, “Challenge to Fascism” (1938), “a record of the 1938 May Day march in Glasgow” (Allen, 96). Biggar later worked for the Glasgow Unity Theatre, toiling on progressive theatrical productions. Even with a limited filmography, Biggar’s multifaceted contributions as an artist, filmmaker, theater producer, and activist solidify her significance in this era of Scottish filmmaking and culture.

“Hell Unltd” benefited from a successful release. It was widely seen as a major achievement by the Glasgow Kino Group, and its directors reaped some success because of it. McLaren was able to parlay this film and others into a filmmaking career under the guidance of

John Grierson, who, though he may not have identified with the film's polemic, certainly identified and successfully recruited McLaren's talent. Curiously, Biggar did not benefit from Grierson's patronage or tutelage, even though she shares equal creative credit for "Hell Unltd." It is unclear if this is because Biggar was a woman, though this would not be the last time Grierson failed to assist a talented female filmmaker. Shortly after the film's release, it was distributed by Kino Films Limited. This is not to be confused with the Glasgow Kino Group; rather, Kino Films Limited was a "successful distribution network" of experimental and socialist films in the 1930s in the UK (Worley, 216). The distribution by Kino certainly widened the film's exposure, and many outside the socialist or filmmaking contingents saw it. After the Second World War, many of the Workers' Film Societies disbanded, and the film was mostly forgotten. Aside from some scholars, archivists, and experts on Norman McLaren, "Hell Unltd" was infrequently discussed and even more rarely screened. Today, however, the film is available on YouTube, probably because McLaren is a giant in the history of animation and a filmmaking treasure in Canada. His ongoing respect amongst animators and scholars of animation and experimental film make the omission of "Hell Unltd" a curious oversight. Nonetheless, the film found new viewership in the digital age.

*Plot Summary:* The film opens on a close-up of a World War I-era gasmask, and, in stark black and white, it looks very much like a human skull. The next shots are close-ups of a man's face (whom we later learn is the personification of the arms industrialist), the title screen, and credits. These are followed by the dedication: "This film is addressed to all who are made to pay each day for their own and other people's destruction, to all who are taxed just now to pay for the future murder of millions of men, women, and children, and especially to those who sit back and say, 'We can do nothing about it.'" In the background behind these words, we see images of

coins, destroyed homes, and a man standing with his hands in his pockets. A series of cleverly animated scenes follow this prelude, illustrating the increasing financial resources devoted to armaments in the British national budget over the course of the 1920s and 1930s.

Live action, fiction scenes portray the captains of the arms industry in league with politicians who drum up nationalistic fervor, leading to World War I. Slogans from the First World War like “War to end War” and “Make the world safe for democracy” are mocked during scenes featuring exploding trench miniatures and dramatizations of political rallies. The costs of World War I in lives and injuries is graphically portrayed with animated charts. The film then links the costs of that war with the current Great Depression by photo and live-action documentary footage montages of unemployment lines and hungry children. Fictional dramatizations of arms dealers and politicians placing tanks and ships on money scales are intercut with the same documentary footage. Another sequence of shots condemns specific corporations, like DuPont, by placing the name of the company above a real human skull, again linking the business of warfare with human death. A live-action scene portrays an arms dealer selling and reaching an agreement with a Nazi official, and then later traveling to the UK and selling arms to the British government.

The increase in British arms industries is justified by those in power as a benefit to the economy and by the fact that other countries are arming. Shots of a chessboard and chess pieces that disappear and are replaced by bombs, tanks, and figurines of people increase the tension as the film predicts another major war. As the players move the pieces on the board, shots of children and families screaming, hiding, burning, and roofs collapsing on them assault the viewer in a series of rapid shots.

In the final few minutes, the film becomes shockingly violent for its time, using images of real, bombed buildings and actors in makeup lying dead and wounded. Photo montages of more death and destruction lead up to the climax. Just as the destruction seems most intolerable, the film presents a title card: "STOP IT." This is followed by cards that read, "No war can be waged without the masses," "ACT NOW," and "write," as the filmmakers encourage citizens to write their MPs. Next come the words, "If that fails," "then," "demonstrate," with shots of peaceful rallies and demonstrations. This climax of the film concludes with the title cards "If that fails," "THEN," "mass resistance is better than mass murder," "strike." A stop-motion animated scene of the aforementioned chessboard depicts the people/pawns joining hands and pushing the weapons of war off the chessboard. These shots indicate that solidarity and collective action are the best ways to overcome the collusion of war industries and governments. In a live action scene, the arms manufacturers fall over as if stricken. The film ends on a close-up of a young girl laughing followed by the animated people hand-in-hand, circling on the chessboard.

*Analysis:* "Hell Unltd" performs many of the functions of short films described in chapter one. It served as a training ground for Norman McLaren, as well as a calling card for his future work in filmmaking. Additionally, "Hell Unltd" was co-created by a woman filmmaker, and it also represented the views of a group of socialists who wanted to critique their nation's economic policies and militarization. As a work by students and amateurs, this film represents views by regular people unconnected to London or Hollywood industries or the political establishments. Its mix of film techniques grab the viewer's attention, and force contemplation of the issues at hand.

One of the most striking aspects of "Hell Unltd" is its unequivocal damning of the military industrial complex before there was such a term. Unfortunately, its message has lost

neither timeliness nor relevance, given the continuing effects of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Great Recession. Its foresight regarding World War II is remarkable, too. “Hell Unltd” correctly argues that unless mass collective action throughout Europe grinds the gears of war to a halt, there will be another conflict. Additionally, this short film remains significant for its blend of filmmaking techniques and modes, its depiction of a contemporary United Kingdom (and Scotland), and its counter-narrative that lays the blame for World War I, the Depression, and an impending future war at the feet of capitalists in collusion with governments. This is an excellent example of the short film’s ability to forcefully make a call to action, as Eisenstein suggested. Because a short like “Hell Unltd” can be made and distributed quickly, its impact can be almost immediate. At the same time, speed does not necessarily force the short to sacrifice depth of meaning.

Capitalism is critiqued in several ways in this film. The second half of the title, “Unltd,” is an allusion to the suffixes used in the names of various corporations (i.e. Ltd, Co., Inc., etc.). The first half, “Hell,” brings all of the companies mentioned in the film (and possibly many more unmentioned but participating in various aspects of the arms trade) under the umbrella category of those who bring hell to the majority of the world. This title immediately counters the nationalist, documentary trend of filmmaking at the time most clearly exemplified by the Empire Exhibition series. In that series and in other documentaries of the 1930s (like “Night Mail,” Watt and Wright, 1936), depictions of various British industries project a supposedly unified Empire: the state is benevolent and responds to the concerns of its subjects and industries; British industries are a marvel of the modern world and the bedrock of the Empire; and British subjects work in harmony to do their part. “Hell Unltd” challenges those assumptions by claiming that capitalist elites take public money and use it to create and sell products that bring death and



destruction. The working classes are forced to kill each other, and pay for their own destruction and the destruction of others. The UK is not the only offender in “Hell Unltd,” but rather the entire developed world and its arms industries. Capitalism is the problem, and most governments are too weak or too corrupt to pursue the best interests of the vast majority of people. Massive corporations rule by proxy and only populist movements have a hope defeating them. Again, this is an example of the short film’s capacity to intervene against ideologies promoted by the industrial mainstream film, and even the mainstream political culture of the time.

Even though Scotland itself is not foregrounded in this film, it is undoubtedly a Scottish film. The circumstances of the film’s production support this because its original footage was shot in and around Glasgow, and it is a product of the Glasgow School of Art and the Worker’s Film Society. We may infer that the contemporary Scotland and the Scots seen in the film, by virtue of the film’s location shooting and its production team, stand in for a pan-European or global working class.

“Hell Unltd” reflects a certain Scottish sensibility for the value of community, as well as openness to socialism that was marginalized within much of the UK at the time. Serious movements for devolution and Scottish independence were years away, and this film presents something more like Scottish (and a Scottish working class) disagreement with the policies of the British Empire. This dissent is significant because it signals that not all is as well and unified within the UK as the official cinema of the time suggests. The success of this film attests to the fact that discontent with the military industrial complex found an audience within Scotland and beyond, and this film was seen by socialist circles throughout Europe, and even by some in the mainstream audience.

The wider exposure of this film beyond a handful of students and socialist groups within Glasgow also shows how “Hell Unltd” served as a launching pad for Norman McLaren, and as a kind of creative currency for both McLaren and Helen Biggar. As mentioned above, after “Hell Unltd”’s release, McLaren was recruited by Grierson and eventually migrated to Canada where he became an animation legend. Biggar remained more committed to the political causes espoused in “Hell Unltd” with her prominent place in progressive Glasgow theater. In the filmmakers’ cases, “Hell Unltd” led to more advanced creative positions for both McLaren and Biggar. This shows that, even in this early example, short films may serve as a form of creative currency, either paying for entry into a filmmaking career (McLaren) or greater prestige within the artistic classes (Biggar). What is more, creative positions within mainstream filmmaking in London and Hollywood were dominated by men in the 1930s, so Biggar’s contribution as a woman filmmaker should be recognized, too, even if she did not enjoy a long filmmaking career.

The film’s varied techniques and strategies also countered both the mainstream, fictional short films of the time (such as Hollywood’s *Laurel and Hardy* and *Our Gang* series) as well as established modes of short documentaries. “Hell Unltd” contains a tremendous amount of animation, both hand drawn and stop-motion. The various animated sequences of the film include moving charts, diagrams, figurines, and more as the film attempts to graphically show how much the arms industry costs in terms of money and human suffering. Animation compensates for the lack of sound, providing dynamic visuals rather than dialog. Visual metaphors, such as the chess set with the people of the world as pawns and the capitalists and their weapons as the more powerful pieces, reinforce the themes of the film. Conventional live action scenes of the capitalists selling their wares to world leaders, and the later scenes of brutal violence serve to ground the message in reality. Some of the most poignant images are scenes in

which parents place World War I-era gas masks on their children; these are contrasted with the laughing capitalists in their tuxes and top hats. Eisensteinian montage is on full display here, as the influence of Soviet filmmaking on the filmmakers and the Workers' Film Societies is apparent in the juxtaposition of images to create new meanings and inspirations for collective action. Indeed, this is exactly the kind of short filmmaking Eisenstein advocated for when he discussed his montage theory in relation to short films. Just a few years after the making of "Hell Unltd," Eisenstein would argue that the short film has enormous potential for political impact – this potential is realized in Biggar's and McLaren's work. The film simultaneously makes a political argument, attempts to inspire the working classes, tells a dramatized account of the masters of war, and serves as anti-war propaganda. With no corporate or government mandate (or funding), the filmmakers were free to express themselves as best they could given their limited resources. The result is a dynamic film that mixes animation, documentary, and fiction filmmaking techniques in order to make a moral and political statement.

Given the historical context and the dominant kinds of filmmaking in and about Scotland at the time, the only way "Hell Unltd" could have been made was as a short film. It remains a classic example of an alternative kind of filmmaking practice that reveals a sentiment counter to official histories of unity and British togetherness. Eschewing a nationalist British ethos, contemporary Glasgow and Glaswegians stand in for a global working class victimized by, and opposed to, capitalist arms manufacturers and dealers. The film's attack on that industry proved daring and ultimately fruitful for its filmmakers as they went on to other projects.

### Post-War Amateurs and Artists

After World War II, many of the Workers' Film Societies died off. In terms of radical filmmaking, only the Dawn Cine Group continued the work of the Glasgow Kino Group. Composed of Communist party activists, they produced short documentaries during the 1940s and 1950s that critiqued social conditions like slum housing, rural depopulation, and nuclear weapons. Their most well-known film is "Let Glasgow Flourish" (1952/56), a fifteen-minute documentary campaigning for better housing conditions. Apart from this, however, socialist and radical filmmaking went nearly extinct as the new post-war welfare state took shape. Indeed, filmmaking outside of the two main strains – the documentary and the London/Hollywood feature – was, as Robin MacPherson succinctly puts it, "the preserve of three groups: enthusiastic amateurs; a tiny clutch of artists using film as their primary medium; and a few determined professionals endeavouring, through the occasional self-financed short film or via more adventurous narrative elements smuggled into documentaries, to escape the bounds of sponsorship and graduate to the feature film" (2015, 35). Through the 1960s, there was no feature film industry within Scotland, and there were no film schools to teach students the art and craft of filmmaking (and serve as a constant supplier of short fiction films to add to the national repertoire). Scottish public funding for film production did not appear until the early 1980s, either, so those amateurs and artists working in film were forced to succeed by means outside of industry, institutions of education, or state support. Independent amateurs – sometimes working on their own, and sometimes working within an amateur filmmaking club – carried short fiction filmmaking in Scotland for decades.

## Enrico Coccozza

Enrico Coccozza exemplified a method of independent, amateur filmmaking that yielded some of Scotland's most significant short fiction films and, in all likelihood, the first examples of Scottish queer cinema. As an ambitious filmmaker, Coccozza created his own "Little Hollywood" (Miller, 274), and several of his films undercut the mainstream conception of Scottish masculinity at the time, most notably "Bongo Erotico." In addition, his works of fantasy, comedy, and drama contrasted with the dominant, fact-based and documentary forms of filmmaking open to Scots. Though he briefly dabbled in professional filmmaking, his work did not gain much critical attention until after his death in 1997, when his films were given to the Scottish Screen Archive for preservation. His works were more broadly revisited in 2001 when "a television documentary brought his work to public attention for the first real time in over four decades" (Miller, 295).

Unlike the early work by McLaren and Biggar mentioned above, Coccozza did not often work with an established filmmaking group like the Glasgow Kino Group or any of the Worker's Film Societies. Instead, he created something of his own film society, in which he was the studio head, chief producer, and director of its productions. As a result, his works reflect more of his personal concerns, yet these concerns are inherently political, as well. His films reflect his statuses and interests as a first-generation Scot and as a queer (but closeted) man. They range from the horrific to the fantastic to the highly sexual as they contemplate the places and roles of outsiders in the contemporary milieu, which, for Coccozza, was the mid-twentieth-century town of Wishaw, about 20 miles southeast of Glasgow.

Enrico Coccozza was born on November 6, 1921 to Giuseppe and Assunta Coccozza. His parents were immigrants from Italy, and they owned an ice cream shop in Wishaw on High

Street called the Belhaven Café (Miller, 271). The café provided Coccozza with employment, income, a meeting place, and a filmmaking “studio” for much of his life. Coccozza’s parents indulged his artistic interests during childhood and beyond. In Mitchell Miller’s profile of Coccozza, he writes that around 1937 Enrico acquired a film camera (272). Later, Coccozza attended and graduated from Glasgow University, and his fluency in Italian made him well-suited for a position as Staff Sergeant Interpreter for the Italian Labour Battalion in Gorton, Manchester, working with Italian prisoners of war from 1944-1946 (Miller, 272). Guiseppe died in 1943, and after the war Coccozza taught Italian at Glasgow University and helped his mother with the Belhaven Café. At this time, his filmmaking took on a more organized form, with some help from the café’s cash register (Miller, 274).

According to his personal writings in *Assunta* (Coccozza’s biographical account of his mother, currently held at the Scottish Screen Archive), around 1947 Coccozza

gathered together some cine enthusiasts and formed a film unit...Films were planned and quickly put into production. The actors and actresses were recruited from the café customers, some of whom were already playing an active part in local amateur dramatics. A film society was constituted. Enrolments [sic] were promising and soon there were more than 200 members (254-5).

The ever-rotating cast of amateur actors and film technicians worked in the café’s back rooms, and around 1948 Coccozza converted an adjoining auction house and garage into a 100-seat cinema for the society (Miller, 275). The cinema screened Coccozza’s shorts, as well as films by Jean Cocteau, Vittorio de Sica, and Jean Renoir, and Hollywood classics (Miller, 275). The café on Wishaw’s High Street buzzed with cinema activity, and it became a thriving social scene for many young people. The café served as a hangout, a place to eat, and a venue for young, artistic-minded individuals to connect in front of, or behind the camera. Short filmmaking and filmmaking societies in this context serve as a community-building, collective art practice.

Cocozza and his crew won several amateur film awards, including Scottish Amateur Film Festival prizes, and some felt that he would make a transition to Hollywood, or at least the mainstream British film industry. It never happened. In 1951 Cocozza attended the Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia in Rome for the summer filmmaking program (along with fellow Scot, Margaret Tait), but his only professional work was factual; these included “public service shorts or commercial clients like *Glasgow’s Docklands* (1956) made for Educational Films of Scotland, or *Meet the Stars* (1960) funded by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society” (Miller, 292). The gap between Cocozza’s ambitions to make bigger and better fiction films, and his sparse opportunities to make professional films led to frustration.

The Scottish amateur filmmaker’s route from amateur status to professional is, and, seemingly, has always been circuitous and fraught with pitfalls. This proved true for Cocozza. Contemporary figures like Lindsay Anderson, Peter Watkins, and Karel Reisz benefited from the BFI Experimental Film Fund and/or television, but in the end Cocozza was unable to secure enough allies to break through to larger projects. His work was admired by many, including Films of Scotland chief, Forsyth Hardy, but Cocozza never made the move to one of the UK’s major metropolises. His entrenchment at the Belhaven was both a source of security and frustration, and by the late 1950s Cocozza abandoned filmmaking for pursuits in teaching and research on Jean Cocteau (Miller, 288).

Cocozza was a versatile filmmaker, and his short films reflect his interest in many genres. His filmmaking troupe, the Connoisseur Groupe, created a number of challenging films that skirted the borders between traditional narrative, surrealism, and experimental filmmaking. Examples of this include the aforementioned “Bongo Erotico,” “The Cat,” and “Fantasmagoria.” The short fiction format enabled him to follow his fancies, and explore ideas ranging from non-

heteronormative sexualities in “Bongo Erotico” and “Fantasmagoria” to juvenile delinquency and poverty in “Chick’s Day,” and even the Cold War in “Twilight.”

Cocozza also self-mythologized as his amateur career progressed, stating falsely that he had worked with Jean Cocteau and King Vidor (Miller, 290). While his work was well received at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, he was never able to achieve widespread critical or commercial success. In 1960, he quit filmmaking for nearly twenty years citing “disaffection with the limitations of amateur work” and problems with his eyesight (Miller, 287). He returned to filmmaking in 1978 with “Fit O’ The Toon,” “an impressionistic return to former realist interests, detailing everyday life around the road junction outside the former Belhaven Café” (Miller, 288). His final work, *Route 66* (1983), is “an overlong, largely disinterested meditation from Cocozza’s sitting room window, documenting a day in the life of an auto-supplies shop across the road from his flat” (Miller, 289).

A series of “what ifs” arise when considering Cocozza’s career and legacy. If he had lived in New York City, perhaps he would have become part of the experimental film underground alongside figures like Jack Smith; or, if he had moved to London, perhaps he would have become a colleague of Lindsay Anderson and Peter Watkins. Instead, his films remained in boxes underneath his bed until late in his life when he donated them to the Scottish Screen Archive. New study and scholarship on Cocozza’s contributions to Scottish film history and culture arrived only within the last fifteen years thanks to the Archive and the 2001 television documentary, *Surreally Scozzese*. That documentary paints Cocozza as a “peculiarly national fantasist and avant-gardist, a continental ‘intellectual manqué’ stranded in the industrial heartland of 1950s Scotland” (Miller, 295). Nevertheless, new scholarship on Cocozza and his contemporary, Margaret Tait, argue that where their films “best succeed is in their commitment



to the present of the national society and culture from which both filmmakers worked” (Neely and Riach, 2009, 15). Many of his films are now available online at the Scottish Screen Archive website, and the subjects of this section, *Chick’s Day* (1950) and *Twilight* (1955) exemplify many of Coccozza’s intellectual concerns, as well as his filmmaking style.

**“Chick’s Day”** directed by Enrico Coccozza

1950, 28:05 minutes, Black and White, Sound

Principal Production Credits

Writer, Producer and Director: Enrico Coccozza

Assistant Cameraman: James Craig

Lighting: Henry Blakeway

Assistant Director: Sadie Curran

Makeup: Betty Heron

Sound Engineers: Harold Skaife and Philip Johnston

Principal Cast: John Graham as Chick

Margaret McCreadie-Parker as His Mother

Gerald Cahill as Jerry

James Malcolm as Mr. Bruce

Sadie Curran as The Girl

John Murdoch as The Bookie

John Lawrie as Johnny

Martha Marshall as First Housewife

Marion Bavis as Second Housewife

*Production Information and Context:* “Chick’s Day” was shot silent with the sound added later. Viewers will notice the use of the Belhaven Café as a prominent location within the film, and the surrounding neighborhoods of Wishaw. This film provides an excellent example of Coccozza’s use of the Belhaven as a filmmaking location and as his own personal studio in order to tell a story about contemporary youth in working class Scotland, a concern avoided by both Hollywood and the mainstream British film industry at the time.

This film was one of Coccozza’s most acclaimed. It won the Amateur Cine World Film of the Year for 1951 and the Scottish Amateur Film Festival Lizar prize in 1951. The film was later distributed by Contemporary Films of London in their collection, “Classics of Silent Cinema” (National Library of Scotland), and screened in Moscow, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand (Neely and Riach, 2009, 15). Currently, it is available on the Scottish Screen Archive’s web site and at the Scottish Screen Archive.

Audiences familiar with British cinema history should note the many ways “Chick’s Day” prefigures the “British New Wave” (or “kitchen sink”) films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Those later works, like *Look Back in Anger* (1959, Tony Richardson), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960, Karel Reisz), and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962, Tony Richardson) feature disaffected, young male protagonists struggling with issues of social class, economic opportunity, family troubles, and post-war materialism. Those themes are present in “Chick’s Day,” a film that strongly anticipates *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* in its portrayal of juvenile delinquency and domestic conflict. In some ways this film also anticipates the monumental achievement of Bill Douglas’s *Trilogy*, in particular the first two parts, *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*, in its brutal portrayal of poverty and the emotional violence of the protagonist’s existence. Strikingly, “Chick’s Day” addresses youth crime and

mid-century working class struggles before the seminal work by writers like John Osborne (who wrote the 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*) and Allan Sillitoe (writer of both the novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and the short story that would become *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*) brought the phrase “angry young man” into the national consciousness.

Cocozza’s ability to express, in a dramatic way, the troubles of some Scottish youth circa-1950 should come as no surprise. His café was a prominent hangout for teenagers from a variety of backgrounds, and Cocozza himself was popular with the youth that frequented his establishment. It may be inferred, then, that he was able to draw upon both the increasing national attention given to troubled youth, and also the real-life experiences that teenagers shared with him. Though the obscure “Chick’s Day” is not commonly thought of as a key forerunner of the British New Wave, or an early example of an “angry young man” text, it deserves to be placed alongside the works of Osborne, Richardson, Reisz, and others for its “kitchen sink,” realist aesthetics and the contemporary issues the film addresses.

*Plot Summary:* As the film begins, Cocozza’s dedication to his father, Guiseppe, is the first image the viewer sees. A contemporary jazz soundtrack is the first audible sound. The title credits are displayed over an establishing shot of the Belhaven Café. These are followed by shots of boys playing in the street and the working class neighborhood they live in. The scenery is gray and cheerless. Laundry hangs on the line. Cocozza cuts to a medium close up of Chick, a young man in his late teens lying in bed and the voiceover narration begins. We learn that Chick “never knew ma father.” He dresses, cleans up a bit and makes breakfast. The setting reveals poverty through the sparse, dirty interior of the house. Chick complains in voiceover about his mother, who has an alcohol problem. He says “I couldna keep a job... I was lazy, and what could she do?

The whore... I hated her guts.” While Chick eats breakfast, his mother sits at the table and begins to berate him. They fight verbally, then physically. She throws Chick out of the house.

Chick walks downtown, meeting Joe on the way, and they walk to the Belhaven Café. They hang out on the corner, buy food, and go to the playground. The rest of their gang arrives; all are young, working class males without jobs. They play dice and Chick loses most of his money. The gang flees in fear of approaching authorities, and Chick makes his way to the old gamekeeper, Jimmy. Chick reveals that Jimmy is his only confidant. He is the only positive adult figure in Chick’s life, someone Chick says, “I could tell him all about my bother.”

Later, Chick meets up with his friend, Jerry, who has a plan to burglarize a house. They go there and ring the doorbell. Since no one answers, they think no one is home, but a shot inside the house reveals a woman sleeping. They enter the back door and go through the woman’s valuables, stealing money. They knock a vase off the dresser and the woman wakes up and investigates. She discovers Chick and Jerry in the midst of their robbery, and they assault her. In the struggle, she faints, and they run off into the woods. Jerry demands his share of the money, and they begin to fight when Chick does not give it to him. Initially, Jerry gets the better of Chick and takes the money. Chick recovers, however, catches up with Jerry, and they fight again. This time Chick beats Jerry senseless, smashes his head on a rock, and possibly kills him.

Confused and scared, Chick runs into town and meets up with the gang, to whom he says, “I think I’ve done Jerry in!” He runs home. A long shot of a barren street visually reinforces the voiceover in which Chick says he felt “wee and lost.” He passes out just as he arrives on his front step, experiencing a surrealistic vision of floating money and Jimmy’s face. When he wakes up, he pounds on the door, begging his mother to let him in. She can not hear him because she is drunk and partying with her “fancy man.” Shots of Chick crying and pleading outside the door

are cut parallel with shots of his mother laughing drunkenly with her lover. Chick slumps onto the doorstep, telling us that he “cursed myself, poor miserable bastard that I was, I cursed... I cursed...” A panning shot away from Chick and over the neighborhood rooftops ends the film.

*Analysis:* This short film accomplishes almost all of the functions described in chapter one. In particular, it excels at complicating the national narrative and focusing on small, but important moments. Disaffected, working class Scottish youth star in this film at a time when few filmmakers approached their experiences. Additionally, a day in the life of a troubled teen is made to feel like an eternity, as a few bad decisions and unfortunate moments play out. Chick’s day, and his life, are shown in a tragic microcosm of horrifying small moments of violence and self-loathing. This film, like many short films, emphasize the importance of brief instances that potentially ruin a character’s life, reminding viewers one bad decision may spawn numerous negative and lasting consequences.

Juvenile delinquency greatly concerned mainstream filmmakers on both sides of the Atlantic for decades after the war. Sensational news headlines and crime reports seemed to indicate that the new, post-war demographic, the “teenager,” had time and money to spend, and a proclivity for antisocial behavior. In many instances in American films like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, Nicholas Ray) and *High School Confidential* (1958, Jack Arnold), the disaffected youth come from middle-class backgrounds and traditional, two-parent households. There were exceptions, of course, like *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955, Richard Brooks) that focused on issues of class and race, but these matters were more muted than in the United Kingdom. “Chick’s Day” is remarkable, in part, because of its particularly Scottish perspective and the experiences of lower class teen angst and rebellion.

Certainly, the “angry young man” films mentioned above had much to say about class, but in a firmly English context. Scottish youth are strangely absent from this era of British filmmaking, and “Chick’s Day” provides one of the only artifacts of working class teen struggles from the 1950s. The film’s use of voiceover narration serves a number of functions, including insights into those difficulties. Chick’s accent (via voiceover) is Scottish, and the dialog contains a large number of Scots words. This voiceover narration gives insight into Chick’s experiences and inner thoughts, while at the same time locating him as a working class, Scottish youth in 1950. The viewer can easily imagine that some of the teenagers in Wishaw talked, dressed, and acted just like Chick.

In addition to accent and the use of Scots throughout the film, the locations and settings give insight into poor and working class life in mid-century Scotland. Post-war prosperity was only partially true, and many parts of Scotland did not enjoy as much of that prosperity as other parts of the UK and the US. Indeed, as Devine accounts, “By 1951 there had been some improvement, but still a little less than a third of all Scottish dwellings had no more than two rooms. As late as 1951, 43 per cent [sic] of all Scottish households did not have access to a fixed bath... A third of Scottish households shared a WC in 1951” (530). In Wishaw, the location of “Chick’s Day,” Devine writes that “between 40 and 50 per cent [sic] of families” shared bathrooms (530). This fact explains a scene early in the film in which Chick urinates in the sink before making breakfast. The film’s account of the material conditions of a poor young man in a bad home situation is validated by official statistics and quality of life measurements from that time.

This film also offers an alternative to the dominant romantic, rural, Tartan and Kailyard representations of Scotland in fiction films of the time. A mainstream film about Scotland like

Disney's *Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue* (1953, Harold French) could hardly be more different than "Chick's Day" in terms of industry and ideology. Additionally, the liminal phase that Chick finds himself in, as an adolescent on the cusp of adulthood, but also in legal limbo after he commits robbery and possibly the murder of his friend, unsettle narratives about a stable, post-war British society. This speaks to the ways it explores liminality as a key function of the short film. "Chick's Day" forces the viewer to think about contemporary living conditions and issues of poverty and youth unemployment, but it provides no reassuring answers or solutions. Instead, the story suggests that delinquency and poverty are multifaceted and complicated issues stemming from a lack of economic opportunity, poor living conditions, unhealthy family and interpersonal relationships, and more. Rather than a sweeping epic meant to stand in for the Scottish working class or the Scottish nation, "Chick's Day" focuses on a single, small figure during a brief and seemingly insignificant amount of time – a single day – in order to express some of the problems occurring in contemporary Scotland that few, if any, films of the time acknowledged.

**"Twilight"** directed by Enrico Coccozza and Graeme Cullen

1955, 16:51 minutes, Black and White, Sound

Principal Production Credits

Writer: Enrico Coccozza

Photographer: Gavin Brown

Principal Cast: Louise Boyd

Leslie Crawford

Jack Smith

Ella Hill

Mark Cooke

Jack Ralston

Jack Griffen

Bill Bailey

James Kane

George Forsyth

Philip Duddy

*Production Information and Context:* Coccozza's 1955 effort, "Twilight," arrived at the height of his little film studio's productivity and popularity. Coccozza was a few years removed from his summer lessons at the Centro in Rome, and this particular film reflects a greater willingness to take some aesthetic chances. Low-budget visual effects, slow motion, and other camera effects are on display as Coccozza broadens his concerns from realism to fantasy. It, too, is available on the Scottish Screen Archive web site.

"Twilight," like "Chick's Day," is highly reflective of its times and some of the central issues of the day. By the mid-1950s, the Cold War was at its height, with the United Kingdom a staunch ally of the U.S. and the West in its struggle against the Soviet Union and Communism. The fear of atomic warfare was also at or near its zenith as well, and this film speaks to the apprehension that at any given moment, the planet might be turned to ashes. This possibility inspired numerous science fiction and horror films of the time, including *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), and Coccozza the cinephile was undoubtedly aware of these films. "Twilight" also anticipates Peter Watkins's faux-documentary, *The War Game* (1965), in its Cold War portrayal of nuclear nightfall in the UK.



Cocozza's filmmaking group gets out of Wishaw and into the countryside with "Twilight," setting a post-apocalyptic tale amidst the rolling brushlands and open spaces. The rural Scotland of this film is no idyllic and magical paradise like in *Brigadoon* – it is a barren nightmare where old, pagan gods may rule in the wake of humanity's destruction. Like many low-budget horror and science fiction films that would follow it, Cocozza makes use of a small group of people on a quest in the wilderness. Here he shows a bleak view of the Scottish countryside and a slightly tongue-in-cheek speculation of the future.

*Plot Summary:* Set in the near future, the first shot of the film captures the sun through smoke, or clouds. Ominous music begins. It is reminiscent of the scores of 1950s science fiction films and later, *The Twilight Zone*. Voiceover narration tells the viewer: "The first and last atomic night is falling. It took three hours for it to sear across the earth... remnants of men move, already half dying." A long shot reveals a ragged, dirty band of young men and women trudging along in the brushland. The landscape is desolate, with no other people or signs of civilization anywhere. They are led by a young woman in a black dress as they walk toward a hill with two cylindrical stones at its top. The voiceover says that this hilltop is the "stone of the gods."

The leader picks flowers from among the grass. A boy, apparently ill or wounded, is helped by another boy as they walk on. He hallucinates and hears birds, acknowledges that the birds are all dead, and then he collapses and dies. The other teenage boys in the group pick him up and carry his body as they continue on their journey to the hill. They place the flowers in his hands and lay the dead boy at the feet of the stones as a sacrifice. The woman prays, but nothing happens. Close-ups of each member of the group show their varying reactions from despair to hope to confusion.

Suddenly, the dead boy's body disappears, leaving the flowers at the foot of the stones. The gods accept the sacrifice. In an ambitious visual effects shot, two gods (in the guise of teenage boys) appear at the top of the stones. The combination double-exposure and superimposition of these figures indicates that something marvelous has happened. The voiceover alerts the audience that "the twin gods of the 50s – Rock and Roll – have come to see their worshippers." They stand imperiously, but Roll steps down and walks in slow motion to the group. Roll spreads his arms, fire leaps up, and several members of the group fall and are disintegrated or disappear in the flames. The woman cries. Roll goes to the woman and he is "touched by her beauty to a new desire... he denies his divinity, deserts his brother." They turn their back on the other god, Rock, and begin to walk down the hill. "From them, perhaps, a better race might spring," the narrator speculates, as shots of a scythe and flames again appear. The god, Rock, says "Go then, and breed and multiply, and in a thousand years again destroy. And when your remnants, brother, to this hill of truth return, and cry to me, and wail and grieve, my ears shall hear not, nor my eyes perceive." The woman and Roll walk away from the hill, arms around each other. Rock looks on, silhouetted in long shots as the light fades, reminiscent of the sweeping landscape shots of John Ford's films.

*Analysis:* "Twilight" reveals the breadth of Coccozza's filmmaking interests through its participation in the science fiction and fantasy genres. While a film like "Chick's Day" and others in Coccozza's oeuvre might suggest that realism, or social realism, was his primary concern, that is a misrepresentation of the whole of Coccozza's work. Films like "Twilight," "The Cat" (1956), and "Fantasmagoria" (1948) make apparent Coccozza's imaginative commitment to other genres, like science fiction and horror. With "Twilight," Coccozza subverts the dominant and romantic treatments of the Scottish countryside by presenting it as a post-atomic wasteland –

turning the tourist's and mainstream fantasy film's idea of Scotland on its head. Additionally, "Twilight" proposes a return of older, pre-Christian pagan gods and religious practices as a possibility in a post-apocalyptic setting. In doing so, "Twilight" connects a potential future Scotland with its pre-British and pre-Christian past. The expression of, and/or the return of older religions and myths to Scotland would later become significant in Scottish films, particularly horror films, from the 1990s onward like *Dog Soldiers* (2002, Neil Marshall) and *Outcast* (2010, Colm McCarthy). Coccozza was keenly aware of the present historical moment, and also ahead of his time, anticipating future subjects of Scottish filmmaking while dealing with contemporary fears of atomic annihilation.

The film's setting in the unpopulated brushlands outside Wishaw likely appears convincingly apocalyptic. There are no babbling brooks or bonnie lasses in this Scottish wilderness, only an unending and forbidding countryside. This presentation of Scotland's rural landscape, generally thought of as a national treasure, flies in the face of the popular view of the Scottish land. Oddly enough, the fact that the filmmakers had no budget to significantly alter the landscape or build sets increases the irony of the way the land is depicted. With Coccozza's tongue planted firmly in his cheek (he names his gods "Rock" and "Roll", after all), Scotland is a readymade nuclear wasteland, quite a contrast to the romantic and magical Tartan and Kailyard representations.

Coccozza's film explores ancient Scottish religions and myths, making it one of the first Scottish short fiction films to do so. The filmmaking team accomplishes this by setting the film in the future, though, rather than an ancient past. Their use of location shooting is key in this respect. The depressing post-atomic spaces in the film are most marked by two, large cylindrical stones at the top of a hill. Coccozza and his crew were fortunate to find these natural features

because they serve as convincing and imaginative points for sacrifice to the old, pagan gods of ancient Scotland complete with jealous and vengeful tendencies. As mentioned, Coccozza's film was ahead of its time in its portrayal of pre-Christian religions and exploring pagan practice and mystical experience. Not until *The Wicker Man* (1973, Robin Hardy) was Scottish pagan ritual dealt with in a mainstream film, and later films like the aforementioned *Outcast* and *Dog Soldiers* picked up on similar themes. "Twilight" complicates contemporary ideas of Scottishness as a British and Christian nation by hearkening to an ancient past, albeit in a playful manner.

Finally, the short film serves as a folk art practice with the collaboration of non-professional actors, Coccozza, and his Wishaw crew. Coccozza plays with a typical science fiction scenario that Hollywood put to the screen several times, but makes it his own through the playfulness of the narration and an un-romantic Scottish setting. The film imitates, resists, parodies, and pays homage to mainstream science fiction film, as well as pop culture. This is unsurprising, considering Coccozza's love of Hollywood and independent, foreign films, and this short film is able to combine both in a nearly equal measure while still retaining a uniqueness of vision singular to Coccozza.

### Margaret Tait

Upon her death, Margaret Caroline Tait (1918-1999) was called "Scotland's most independent filmmaker" (Grigor, 1999). She was also, almost exclusively, a short filmmaker. As such, she thrived in a form in which she built that reputation, and, ultimately her status as a beloved Scottish filmmaker. Tait lived to see the beginnings of the New Scottish Cinema and a massive increase in the number of feature-length and critically praised films made by Scots,

though she would not live to participate in that era. However, a strong case can be made that her struggles and decades of independent filmmaking defined what it meant to be a Scottish filmmaker during that time. Her short films' value to Scotland's filmmaking heritage increases as more people discover them, and viewers often comment on the ways she was able to make short films that reflected politics of the personal and everyday things.

During her lifetime, Tait's work went mostly unheralded in her home country, and she was better known in London and abroad where her films were screened. Her works found an audience in the 1970s largely due to her persistence and guerilla marketing (Craven 2009, 28). Sarah Neely contends that, "the oversight of her work on a funding level in Scotland, is reflected in the filmmaker's absence from emerging critical histories of Scottish cinema" (2009, 302). However, near the end of her life and after her death, critics, scholars, and audiences brought about a period of re-discovery. Scholarship on Tait's films and poetry increased in the 2000s. Much of her work is now available on the Scottish Screen Archive's web site. In 2004, Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook edited *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*, published by LUX of London. It was the first book-length treatment of Tait's works, and it published poetry, correspondence, critical essays, photos, and film production documents.

Margaret Tait was born in Kirkwall, Orkney from a "long line of seafaring merchants" (Grigor, 1999). Her chosen profession was medicine, and she graduated from the University of Edinburgh and became a General Medical Practitioner (McBain, no date). Like her contemporary, Enrico Coccozza, she used her earnings to fund her films and other artistic endeavors. She served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Jhansi, India during World War II. There she developed a love of writing and photography, even writing a novel entitled *The Lilywhite Boys*, which was rejected by publishers (Neely 2009: 304). This foretold the future, as

Tait endured repeated rejections by cultural and commercial establishments, but she remained undaunted for over fifty years as an artist.

Tait attended the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome from 1950-1952, forging important friendships with Peter Hollander and Fernando Birri, who collaborated with her on films when she moved back to Edinburgh (Neely, 2009, 305). The 1950s and 1960s were prolific decades of filmmaking for Tait, as she made 33 films in addition to paintings, poetry, and prose. Like those single-artist forms, her short films were often solo projects that enabled her to focus on small, everyday settings and the activities of regular people, much as a still life painter would capture a room or landscape.

Tait's principal interests were far removed from the corporate sponsored documentary films that dominated the period. Instead, Tait was most concerned with the everyday; the small, personal voice; and the contemporary lives of ordinary people. Her filmmaking challenged boundaries between the amateur and the professional, as well as documentary, fiction, and experimental film, making her hard to classify and even harder to "sell."

On the surface, Tait seems like a reclusive artist, making beautiful "film poems" (as she called them) with no interest in professional or narrative filmmaking. This is not the case, nor does it represent the breadth of her artistic ambitions. For example, in 1954 Tait organized the Rose Street Film Festival in Edinburgh in order to showcase her work and her Centro classmates' films. John Grierson was in attendance, and he praised her films, but he did not help her with future financing or distribution as he had for Norman McLaren and others (Neely, 2009, 319). Tait later made a short documentary entitled, "Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait," featuring the famous poet. She lobbied for this film to make an appearance on Grierson's television show, *This Wonderful Life* (1957-1966). Grierson told her that "the film was felt unsuitable for

transmission,” probably because it did not fit the Griersonian model of documentary filmmaking, which was educational and didactic (Neely, 2009: 319). Tait’s vision of documentary was not so strict, allowing viewers to make their own connections. She preferred to poetically tell the story with impressions and foreground small details. Tait continually attempted to raise money from private sources, like Guinness, and public funds such as the Scottish Film Council (Neely, 2009: 320), but nearly all such efforts were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, she organized her own screenings locally and regionally, and sold prints of her films to international organizations, rarely making back the cost of the film itself. As a Scotswoman attempting to make a place for herself within the male-dominated film business, Tait relied most heavily on guerilla marketing and exhibition.

It is a fitting testament to her tenacity that near the end of her life Tait became the first Scottish woman to direct a feature film, entitled *Blue Black Permanent* (1992). That film, like many of her shorts, reveals her attention to the seemingly innocuous moments of daily life, women’s points of view, and her love of water and the sea. Uncompromising to the last, Tait represents a marginalized voice in the history of Scottish cinema in the mid-twentieth century. Her perspective as a woman, working in Edinburgh, the Highlands, and the Islands, is valuable as a Scottish subjectivity rarely put to film during this time.

**“The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo”** directed by Margaret Tait

1955, 6:27 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

Director: Margaret Tait

*Production Information and Context:* Tait's 1955 film is an adaptation of the Gerald Manley Hopkins poem of the same title, with Tait herself providing the voiceover narration. This is significant because the viewer hears Tait's voice (she was almost never in front of the camera) and there is a sense that this particular poem is very meaningful to her, as it meditates on themes of beauty, death, and transience.

"The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" was produced during a robust period of filmmaking for Tait, who was three years removed from her time at the Centro in Rome. At this point in her career, she lived in Edinburgh, renting a workshop on Rose Street where she created her films and other artworks. In her later documentary, "These Walls," produced just as she was about to leave her Edinburgh studio in order to move back to Orkney, Tait grants the viewer a clear picture of her work space and methods. Even by today's DIY standards, Tait's filmmaking was very minimalist. A single table for editing her films, writing, and painting was in the center of the room, and the walls were covered with photographs and images that inspired her. It is very likely that in this room on Rose Street she assembled and refined "The Leaden Echo..." It reveals her resourcefulness, but also some reclusiveness. Unlike Enrico Coccozza's café, Tait's studio was not an active social scene even though she did employ actors and a few other people to help with her films. Overall, though, her process was solitary and reflective. Tait owned her own camera and other film equipment, and she possessed an uncompromising artistic spirit in the face of limited resources and barriers to the industry.

*Plot Summary:* This film is an interpretation of a poem, and as such, its plot is loose. The poem's primary themes are the fleetingness of beauty; the importance of new life; and the inevitability of death and decay. The film opens with a medium close shot of a water spigot. A young man turns the spigot on, catches some water in his hands, and drinks. The film cuts to a



young woman looking at flowers. Two middle-aged men and one woman close and chain a gate somewhere in the countryside; the shots of the chained and locked gate are accompanied by the poem's voiceover which states "keep beauty from vanishing away," as if it could be locked and chained up. A young woman sits near a mirror, examining her face. Another woman in close up looks plaintively screen right. A little girl plays amongst flowers. The voiceover states, "Nor can you long be what you call fair." The first woman examines herself in the mirror, applying lipstick. A young boy plays on the sidewalk. The words, "nothing can be done to keep age at bay," are accompanied by parallel tracking shots of a row of houses and a row of gravestones. A close up of a pile of worms, slithering in the dirt is paired with voiceover that says "despair, despair, despair." We see tilting shots of trees; stained glass in a kirk; a man throwing seeds and dirt onto a field; and another man cutting the grass with a scythe. A beautiful young woman in a medium shot leans against a haystack. The film closes with a montage of close ups on dandelions, eggs, babies, lambs, choir boys, and birds. The voiceover insists, "beauty, beauty, beauty." The final shot captures a bird flying over the sea.

*Analysis:* Tait's films are political in personal ways, and they address her perspective and experiences in mid-century Scotland. This reflects an inward turn of the politics of short filmmaking, generally, in the decades following World War II. Former head of development of Scottish Screen and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts, Robin MacPherson, writes that

Following the war, with the election of a Labour government in 1945 and the Communist Party of Great Britain's move towards parliamentarianism, anti-establishment or 'oppositional' film-making appeared to lose much of its *raison d'être*. A core of film activists based mainly in London continued to document social causes such as the squatters' movement, but almost no such political film-making activity appears to have taken place in Scotland in the 1940s (2015, 34).

The scenario was much the same for the 1950s, and when more activist political cinema practices returned to the United Kingdom in the 1960s, Scotland was "not in a position to be a part of it"

(35). This is where the re-discovery of Scottish post-war short fiction films have a key role to play. With the dominance of the corporate sponsored documentary and no professional filmmaking infrastructure to speak of, many short fiction films of the era focused on the politics of the personal, rather than the national and international as we saw with “Hell Unltd.”

Tait’s film is keenly aware how patriarchal societies value younger (and younger-looking) women more than their older counterparts, and this was as true in 1950s Scotland as anywhere else. The repeated shots of a woman doing her makeup and preening indicate these values, and the story is of a woman reflecting on those ideas as she looks in a mirror. Additionally, the film features many other shots of women looking at themselves, and shots from their points of view as they look upon objects such as eggs, babies, and flowers – all traditional symbols of fertility. The worries of young women regarding beauty and aging are explicitly played out in the film in the scenes in which the young woman scrutinizes her face in a mirror. Beauty standards within patriarchy are interwoven with contemplations of mortality within the film, too.

The film indicates Tait’s knowledge of, and possibly her internalization of traditional women’s roles, but also some reflexivity on those matters. The film’s dwelling on issues and images of beauty and fertility seem to externalize the internal conditioning of patriarchy and traditional gender roles. Feminist theorist Kate Millett summarizes this phenomenon when she writes that, “Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different- and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (31). Important to female gender identity

development, according to Millett, include concepts like beauty, fertility, and certain kinds of work associated with feminine behavior. On the surface, the film certainly appears that the film says women's roles are simply to be beautiful and reproduce. This is complicated, however, when we remember that Tait herself defied many gender norms of the time. She was a doctor, which was a male-dominated profession. She also did not have any children, though she did marry. Nonetheless, these biographical facts do not mean she did not absorb patriarchal gender roles or feel some twinges of anxiety about them. The film's tone is sad, and the poem's meditation on mortality narrated over images of women and their traditional roles might lament their limited options. It is also possible that Tait expresses some frustration with the idea that women's primary values are as beauty objects and reproducers. Artistic production, though, has the potential to overcome these roles and the toll of time, and so the shred of hope appears to come from the film medium itself.

"The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" is cleverly reflexive, as are many of Tait's films. The Gerald Manley Hopkins poem that accompanies the film asks at one point: "is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep / Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, ... from vanishing away?" Lucy Reynolds proposes that Tait's answer is film itself: "Using the medium's ability to arrest and replay time, she offers 'a key to keep back beauty,' catching it in the clear small moments of her mother's hands, an Orkney stream or children playing in an Edinburgh Street" (2004, 69). Thus, the question asked by Hopkins in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" is central to Tait, as well.

For all the praise of Tait's experimental tendencies and poetic style, it is worthwhile to note that without her films there would be far fewer images of mid-century Scottish women and

their experiences and concerns. This makes her a significant figure in Scottish cinema history. Tait's films exemplify how short fiction filmmaking can be a space for women filmmakers to express themselves when denied a place within the mainstream, as well as how they can complicate representations by focusing on the everyday, and the internal aspects of contemporary life like negotiating traditional gender roles.

### Amateur Filmmaking Clubs

In addition to ambitious, creative, and self-funded short filmmakers like Margaret Tait and Enrico Coccozza, the work of Scottish amateur filmmaking clubs also carried the flame of the short fiction film for decades. Cinema clubs formed throughout the United Kingdom early in cinema history, and they consisted largely of enthusiastic amateurs who pursued filmmaking for a variety of reasons, from hobbying to pre-professional training. Their memberships, goals, finances, and quality of filmmaking varied widely. In Scotland, where there was no feature-length, fiction filmmaking infrastructure until the 1990s, amateur filmmaking clubs produced the vast majority of Scotland's fictions on film. In many cases, the output of these groups is lost or of a poor quality, but they created some great, unsung fictions, and a few filmmaking societies endure to this day. In part, the work of this project is to acknowledge and resurrect the contributions of a few of these unsung filmmakers and their impacts on Scottish film and fiction-making.

For a long time, amateur filmmaking groups thrived and contributed significantly to Scottish film culture. The socialist filmmaking groups of the 1930s have already been discussed, but by the early 1930s other groups like the Bearsden Film Club, Glasgow Amateur Cine Club, Edinburgh Film Guild, and Damyamound Picture Club were notable on the scene. Largely

because of the efforts of filmmakers in groups such as these, the Scottish Amateur Film Festival was born on Saturday, October 14, 1933 at the Athenaeum Theatre in Glasgow. Ruth Washbrook states that it “would become one of the most successful and well-respected of amateur film festivals” (2009, 36). Other festivals aimed at amateurs and filmmaking clubs sprang up, as did publications like *Amateur Cine World* (1934-1967) (Washbrook, 2009, 37). With relatively few resources, many Scots took it upon themselves to come together, make, screen, and write about films.

During World War II, some filmmaking clubs ceased activity due to shortages of film stock. The postwar period brought a revival of filmmaking societies and many amateur filmmakers flocked to them. The following section presents a closer look at a typical Scottish filmmaking club. It will describe the working methods of filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s in such clubs, but also the ways in which making and screening short films facilitated community bonding and a kind of folk cinema.

### The Dalziel Cine Club

The Dalziel Cine Club (later known as the Dalziel Cine & Video Club and then the Dalziel Camcorder Club), is one excellent example of a filmmaking society that sprang up in Scotland during the post-war period. There were many of these clubs at the time, but this particular club endured longer than most, from 1960-2008. Upon its dissolution, the members of the club determined that its films and written records should go to the Scottish Screen Archive. Through the group’s archived materials, we are able to view the changes in Scottish film culture and industry through the lenses of the independent outsiders and the amateurs whose methods and collective filmmaking practices that largely fell into obsolescence by the 1990s. Their

histories remain vital to a study of Scottish cinema because they show a variety of subjectivities specific to their members, Scotland's working and middle classes. Additionally, their activities give some insight into the ways filmmaking in Scotland was a community experience, as well as an artistic one.

Brian Saberton, a former Dalziel Cine Club President, compiled a narrative of the filmmaking group's activities from its inception to its end. Included in the narrative and the Dalziel papers are photos, press clippings, meeting minutes, and other materials that provide insights into the group's activities for nearly fifty years. The written record of the origins of the group indicates that amateur filmmaking, particularly short fiction filmmaking, was pursued enthusiastically by a surprisingly large number of people, especially in the group's early years. This enthusiasm in the early 1960s and into the 1970s certainly challenges the idea that no indigenous Scottish cinema existed at that time; rather, it *did* exist. It was a cinema poor in resources, but rich in creativity.

According to the club's first president, H.G. Winslow, the Dalziel Cine Club "was originally founded by Jessie Matthews of Motherwell. She placed an advert in the Motherwell Times inviting anyone interested in forming a cine club to meet at the Motherwell YMCA on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1960" (Saberton, 1). The minutes from the first meeting state that "there was a good attendance of prospective members ... It was decided to hold meetings on alternate Tuesdays..." (Saberton, 1).

Motherwell, Lanarkshire lies about fifteen miles southeast of Glasgow, and today its population is just over 30,000. At the time of the formation of the Dalziel club, Motherwell was the steel production center of Scotland, and had been so since the nineteenth-century. When Ravenscraig steelworks closed in 1992, Motherwell, like many other parts of Scotland, suffered

from high unemployment and the economic fallout of de-industrialization (“Motherwell”). However, at the time of the founding of the Dalziel Cine Club, Motherwell was a reasonably well-off community.

The photo of the founding members of the group from the *Motherwell Times* of October 21, 1960 reveals the initial membership consisted of six men and three women, and all appear to be in their late 30s or older (Saberton, 1). Many of the members of filmmaking groups in Scotland at this time were middle-aged and older individuals, presumably with stable employment (or retirement benefits) and housing.

The first few years of the Dalziel Cine Club brought tremendous growth in membership and films produced. The club’s first competition was held on March 27, 1962 and there were fourteen entrants (Saberton, 1). The minutes of a meeting on October 19, 1962 report that the club had 68 paid members, and by April 30, 1963 membership increased to 73 (2). Throughout the 1960s, membership fluctuated between 50-80 members, a very large number given the size of the city (1-3).

The Dalziel Cine Club made big strides in the 1960s by expanding its activities and competing with other clubs. The group acquired filmmaking and film exhibition equipment, held filmmaking seminars, and published its own magazine. Guest speakers like Dr. Norman T. Speirs of Edinburgh lectured on adding sound to films in December of 1963, and the club held a Christmas social fundraiser on December 8, 1964 (Saberton, 2). Also at this time, the club began to participate in inter-club film competitions. These enriched the filmmaking culture of Scotland as various cinema clubs produced films as a club and then held events and festivals to showcase that work. In April, 1965, the Dalziel club placed fourth of six entries in the competition held by the Avondale Cine Club, which was the forerunner of the Strathclyde Video Event (Saberton, 2).

Saberton's notes from 1967/1968 state that at this time, "the first issue of the club magazine 'Close Up' was edited and published by Jessie Matthews" (3). By late 1966, the group purchased a tape recorder, projector, and a screen. Workshops on titling and documentary filmmaking also occurred during the early years (2).

The 1970s brought challenges and lessened interest, but the group continued to evolve as filmmaking technologies changed. Membership decline was the decade's most upsetting development. The group had about 50 members in 1970 and that decreased to 27 for the 1976/1977 season (Saberton, 4). The causes of this decrease are not stated or speculated upon in the Saberton narrative, or excerpts from the meeting notes. However, records indicate that the club became more expensive to maintain over time. Annual membership dues in 1962 were £1, but by 1978 dues cost £4 per member, with a charge of 10p for tea and biscuits at each meeting. Despite increasing costs throughout the 1970s coupled with decreasing membership rolls, the group remained committed to improving its members' filmmaking skills. On April 4, 1978 Tony Shapps from the Widescreen Centre in London presented on the Cinemascope format. The minutes explain that "This was a system that enabled amateur film makers to shoot their films in the cinemascope format by means of an anamorphic lens attached to the camera which squeezed the image laterally without changing the height" (Saberton, 4). This allowed the Dalziel members to film with a 2.66:1 aspect ratio, rather than the standard 1.33:1, giving the films a more "cinematic" quality with the wider screen.

Most participants in filmmaking clubs were not recruited into the professional film ranks, nor does it appear that many pursued that avenue. This may be, in part, due to demographics. The papers of the Dalziel Cine Club did not record the average age of its members, or other revealing demographic information. However, it may be inferred from the press clippings, group



photos, and published newspaper photos of group members that the membership skewed older. Middle-aged or more well-established adults are less likely to relocate to London or Hollywood than those recently out of school or in their 20s. However, the photos and the notes occasionally contain exceptions. For instance, during the 1969/1970 season, the Dalziel papers state that “John & Jean Ballantyne and their son Iain joined the club” (Saberton, 3). Saberton states that Iain “went on to become a professional studio camera operator at Yorkshire Television in Leeds” (3). No doubt his experiences with Dalziel were formative. Though amateur film societies did not usually serve as boot camps for future professional filmmakers, their films make up a large proportion of what could be considered “Scottish cinema” from 1930-1979. They certainly provided opportunities for people who would not otherwise make films (such as women), as well as opportunities for community-building and socializing.

**“Winner Takes All”** directed by Billy Rae of the Dalziel Cine Club, Motherwell

1968, 7:37 minutes, Color, Sound (added in the 1980s by George Morice)

Principal Production Credits

Filmed by: George Smith

Director: Billy Ray

*Production Information and Context:* “Winner Takes All” was filmed at the Dalziel Co-op on Coursington Road, Motherwell, Lanarkshire, the actual meeting hall of the Dalziel Cine Club. At the time of the film’s production, the group had approximately fifty members. The club also had recently published its own magazine for the first time. Originally, the film was silent, but in the late 1980s George Smith wrote and added voiceover narration and overdubbed dialog. The film works just as well without sound because the filmmaking is skillful enough to tell the

story clearly. The film is notable because it presents a picture (albeit a constructed picture) of the Dalziel Cine Club as it was in 1968. The viewer sees the group's location and the characters and extras in the film are no doubt members of the club, or friends of members. The space is not much larger than a classroom and contains several small tables, many chairs, and chalkboards. It appears that several groups used this space as a meeting hall because there are a number of signs and objects on the walls that have nothing to do with the Dalziel Cine Club. These do-it-yourself techniques in which everyday surroundings serve as settings, and groups of amateurs come together to create a film, are very typical of short fiction films. These strategies enable people to make films with minimal resources.

*Plot Summary:* Handwritten title cards inform the viewer of the title and the only two listed credits. The first shot establishes the setting at the club's meeting hall. A sign on the door reads "Film of the Year Competition Tonight 7:30." Inside the meeting hall, the unnamed, middle-aged male protagonist enters and is greeted by the club's president. The meeting room is mostly full, and the group consists of mostly middle-aged and elderly members. The protagonist looks to the front of the hall and a point-of-view shot zooms on the Rosebowl trophy – the object of his desire.

The voiceover, added approximately twenty years later, informs the viewer that the cine club is "male dominated" and "all the entries from the ladies were ousted." The competition is called to begin by the president. He holds the trophy aloft, and the protagonist states that he "didn't know how I was going to win it." Inspiration strikes, however, and the lead character draws from Agatha Christie's book, *Ten Little Indians*. He concocts a foul plan to murder his fellow competitors. First, he sabotages a projector that Brian was working on, electrocuting and killing him. The group is so aloof, though, that no one notices. Then, the protagonist notices Jack

attempting to unravel a reel of tangled film. With the pretense of helping him, the main character strangles Jack with the celluloid. The third victim is Ken, at work on some last minute cutting. The lead “assists” him by cutting off his hand. The film employs clever editing and plucky homemade special effects to depict this (bloodless) severing of the appendage. Ken, more befuddled than in pain, makes his way to the door, presumably to go to the hospital. Molly gives him his severed hand as he leaves because she dislikes the mess. The final victim is John, who unknowingly drinks drugged tea. With the competition eliminated, the protagonist believes the Rosebowl trophy is his. As he reaches out to take the prize, a close up reveals that the trophy is electrified, zapping the protagonist. One of the women laughs and takes the trophy – she is the last one standing, and the winner. The final voiceover narration states: “I really didn’t think women could stoop so low and use dirty tricks in order to gain the upper hand. But then, they always were the winners.”

*Analysis:* This film is not the early work of a major director, nor is it a lost treasure of a particular filmic movement. Its significance lies in a narrative built around the workings of a 1960s Scottish filmmaking club. Here we see the actual members of the club in their meeting space. We also get a glimpse at the kinds of activities they engaged in as a group, like sharing tea, conversation, screenings, and competitions. The film’s story is simple and comic, and it is a clear case of the filmmakers and the group using the few resources at their disposal to make a light and fun short film. Its DIY aesthetics, self-reflexivity, and winking attitude at sexist filmmaking practices make it an excellent artifact of its time.

The homemade aesthetic of “Winner Takes All” is its most notable characteristic. The filmmaking quality is not much above a home movie, but a few traits set it apart from that genre. First, the film is committed to telling a story, specifically, a black comedy about competition. In

this way it is both reflexive and satiric. The film makes humorous use of its homemade special effects; the flashing lights during the electrocutions and the fake hand reveal playfulness and match the comic tone in spite of their cheesy appearances. The actors may be amateurs, but they are committed to their roles and pull off a number of humorous moments in the film's seven-and-a-half minutes.

Of all the genres produced by amateur clubs like Dalziel, the fiction story film is perhaps the most challenging because, as Ian Craven claims, "it invites comparison with its professional counterpart" (17). Indeed, all of the films discussed in this chapter invite comparisons with their professional counterparts – the "official," mainstream cinema – and all fall technically short of those standards. "Winner Takes All" was clearly shot on a lower-quality film stock, probably Super 8mm, and viewers will notice that all of these films lack synchronized sound and dialog. Nevertheless, amateur cinema is worthwhile on its own terms for all of the functions of short filmmaking it performs that were mentioned in chapter one. If the films are limited in terms of technical proficiency, they have freedom of experimentation in terms of narrative, themes, and politics. Sometimes, as in this case, amateur films explicitly comment on filmmaking itself, forcing viewers to think about the medium and the ways it is constructed for various purposes.

The reflexivity of this particular film shows a heightened awareness of the filmmakers' and the film club's place in relation to mainstream film. First, the film is about a cinema club and its intraclub competition. Intraclub competitions were an important aspect of club activity and membership. A filmmaker could gain status within and among clubs if his or her films won prizes. Enrico Coccozza's domination of various amateur film competitions is one good example. At the same time, the film satirizes the importance of these competitions and some members' eagerness to win. The narrative takes this to the extreme, as one ambitious filmmaker murders

his competition to ensure victory. This hyperbole reveals the truly minor place that amateur competitions and festivals held in comparison to major festivals (such as Cannes, Venice, and even the Edinburgh International Film Festival) and the mainstream industry. The idea that the Dalziel intraclub filmmaking prize is worth killing for shows, ironically, how little the prize is worth to anyone outside the group. Also, the tools and apparatus of filmmaking and exhibition are the murder weapons in "Winner Takes All." This comments on the difficulties of making a film with limitations and literalizes the notion of dying for one's art, as projectors electrocute and editing tables sever limbs. Thus, while the film is amusing, a darker subtext exists in which the amateur filmmakers know their marginalized place and acknowledge the effort and sacrifice it takes to create relatively unappreciated films.

"Winner Takes All" also addresses the sexism of filmmaking practices at the time. The 1980s sound version emphasizes this especially when it states the club was "male dominated" and "all the entries from the ladies were ousted." The film shows this to be incorrect, as there are a significant number of women members onscreen in "Winner Takes All." While women may not have had a numerical majority in many cine clubs, there were far more involved with these kinds of organizations than in most aspects of the mainstream film industries. The ending of the film, in which a woman outsmarts the murderer and murders him in turn, draws its surprise from the setup that women were suppressed in the group. The sound version's final lines are sexist and patronizing: "I really didn't think women could stoop so low and use dirty tricks in order to gain the upper hand. But then, they always were the winners." At the same time, there is some acknowledgement of the contributions of women to this group. On the other hand, is this just a kailyard example of a canny woman unexpectedly outsmarting the men? Or, is it a satire of a hyper-masculine filmmaking culture in general? It is difficult to tell, and the fact that the

voiceover narration was not written and recorded until the 1980s makes it more difficult. Most likely it is a complicated mix of sexism and an acknowledgment of changing gender roles from the late 1960s-1980s. In this case, women were and always had been active members of filmmaking clubs at the same time mainstream filmmaking was dominated by men. By their more inclusive practices, film clubs created a kind of folk filmmaking.

### Film Schools and Bill Douglas in the 1970s

Short fiction filmmaking from the 1930s-1970 performed several functions. Early socialist filmmaking groups created oppositional and anti-war films, most notably “Hell Unltd.” These films critiqued empire generally, and the British Empire specifically, as well as the institution of capitalism as the world plunged deeper into economic depression. Explicitly socialist and progressive filmmaking declined after World War II, but a number of talented artists created challenging and incisive films during this time, as well. Independent artists worked outside mainstream filmmaking Scotland at the time, dominated by the Griersonian and corporate-sponsored documentaries. They also refused to conform to simple Tartan and Kailyard representations. Their works were largely self-funded and examples of shoestring innovation. In some cases, they also prefigured the work of more established, or better exposed, films and filmmakers, such as the British New Wave. For the wider public, alternative images of contemporary life in Scotland were not seen until television in the 1970s.

For those who could not self-fund their filmmaking, or desired a more collegial form of art, filmmaking clubs and societies flourished in Scotland and throughout the UK during the post-war decades. Since Scotland had no feature-length, fiction film industry, amateur clubs created the majority of short film fictions from the 1940s-1970s. Though these films were made

with less expensive tools, they provided a space for Scots to make films and participate in local culture. Some of these films offer an important look at contemporary Scottish social and leisure life at this time. Importantly, these fictions told a story of Scotland not seen elsewhere, and independent and amateur productions were an important cultural tradition for decades. Like many cultural activities, filmmaking underwent significant changes in Scotland as the 1960s ended.

The late 1960s and 1970s brought a number of significant developments that directly affected all filmmaking in Scotland. The first was the increasing role of film schools in the UK. In particular, the influence of, and opportunities provided by, the London Film School (established in 1956) and the establishment of the larger National Film and Television School in 1971 at Beaconsfield Studios in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire had lasting impact. The British Department of Education and Science began work in 1967 to create an educational institution with the mandate to train workers for the British film industry. Interestingly, its first director was Colin Young, a Scot who, at the time, chaired UCLA's Department of Theater Arts.

Even though these two film schools were, and are, located in England, they gave (and continue to give) some Scots an opportunity to learn the skills required for filmmaking, as well as an entry point into the English-speaking film industries. One of the best examples is Newcraighall-born, Bill Douglas, who graduated from the London Film School in 1969 and completed three student films. He went on to international art cinema fame with his *Trilogy* (1972, 1973, 1978) and *Comrades* (1986) (Nowlan, 47). At the National Film and Television School, the curriculum was loose for much of the 1970s, and students spent most of their time making short fiction and documentary films. Until 1986, the school was partly funded through a tax on cinema ticket sales. Increasingly, throughout the 1970s and beyond, film schools replaced

cinema clubs as the preferred filmmaking avenue for young people in Scotland. The film schools also, to an extent, replaced the long-established methods of entry into the British film industry. Prior to the late 1960s, family or professional connections; the benevolence of a paragon of the industry (such as John Grierson); and the sheer luck of gaining an apprenticeship or other entry-level position were the main ways into the industry. The British film schools increased access to filmmaking education and equipment for many, including Scots, who were able to take advantage of their status as citizens of the UK. For the purposes of this study, the film schools in England, and later Scotland, are significant for their prolific production of short fiction films.

Increases in funding and investment by the British Film Institute and the BBC made a second impact on Scottish short fiction filmmaking during this time. Scottish inroads here in the 1970s were small, but they laid the foundation for new sources of funding and exhibition in later decades. The National Film Finance Corporation was established in 1945 and the British Film Institute production board in 1933, yet amazingly few resources found their way to Scottish fiction productions until the 1970s. Historically, the total public resources devoted to filmmaking in the UK were quite small, and Scotland saw almost none. Rather, the main funding body for film production in Scotland was Films of Scotland (1954-1982). However, as David Hutchison points out, this body was “government-encouraged but not government-funded. The money for productions came from the films’ sponsors- industry associations, local authorities, tourist organizations and the like – and that inevitably acted as a constraint on content” (2015, 19). One of the major turns was the British Film Institute’s partial funding of Bill Douglas’s aforementioned *Trilogy*. The reason Douglas’s work received any money at all from the BFI was because its Head of Production, Mamoun Hassan, believed so strongly in the project (Hassan,



1993, 227). The acclaim of the *Trilogy* and the simultaneous death of the sponsored documentary broke the documentary's stranglehold on film financing in Scotland.

Television played an important role in the 1970s, bringing new attention to Scottish subjects and new options for film exhibition. While Scottish short films were not broadcast regularly on television, the BBC began to involve itself more in film production and this would prove crucial for later developments in the 1980s and 1990s. Its series *Wednesday Play* (1964-1970) and *Play for Today* (1970-1984) commissioned several feature productions with Scottish subjects including Peter McDougall's *Just Another Saturday* (1975) and *Just a Boys' Game* (1979). These were major television inroads for Scots and Scottish subjects, and they dealt with issues of masculinity, urban crime, and sectarianism (Hutchison, 2015, 155-157). Years later, Channel Four and the BBC would broadcast Scottish short films. These examples from the 1970s illustrate the broadening of the television horizon in the UK to deal with challenging social subjects from a Scottish point of view. Robin MacPherson adds that Peter Watkins's BBC film, *Culloden* (1964), was an important forerunner of "a Scottish subject examined through a radical television lens" and that the 1974 *Play for Today* broadcast of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Oil* was an "unapologetically political view of Scotland past and present" (MacPherson, 2015, 36). Thus, an increase in film school programs and attendance, new investments by public entities like the BFI and BBC, and the expansion of television and televised subjects brought about a period of profound change for film in Scotland in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition. In addition, political and social events provided fodder for fictions, both feature and short, in the coming decades.

## Bill Douglas

Bill Douglas overcame a wretched childhood and adolescence to become Scotland's most significant art film director to date. As he pushed through many of those difficulties through his own effort, talent, and the help of a few close confidantes, it is clear that short films played a crucial role in his development as an artist. Douglas made short films to practice, experiment, and ultimately propel him into a feature career. His example shows that short films are the first and essential form of filmmaking for the poor and working classes because of the form's potential to reveal aspects of marginalized people's lives without a filter or censorship. In practical terms, short films are usually the only kind of film expression realistically available for those with limited means who also work outside a major industry. Without the short film to provide a start, it is difficult to imagine how any poor or working class person could reach a wide audience or sustain a career in filmmaking. The following biographical information on Douglas shows how far from a filmmaking career he began in life, and how important short films would be to his development as an artist and eventually as a major Scottish filmmaker.

Born in Newcraighall, a small mining village near Edinburgh, in 1934, Douglas was effectively orphaned at a young age and received little love and nurture from his guardians as a child. Douglas's father, 'Black Jock' Douglas was a gambler and womanizer who had a wife and family prior to meeting Bill's mother. He abandoned his new son and the child's mother, Rose Beveridge, almost immediately (Noble, 1993, 15). When Bill was born, Rose suffered from puerperal fever, otherwise known as childbed fever, which is a bacterial infection of the female reproductive tract following childbirth or miscarriage. In an era before antibiotics, Rose Beveridge's case was particularly bad, with the fever also affecting her brain. As a result, she was hospitalized for mental illness. She would remain in a mental hospital for the rest of her life,

unable to care for her young son in any way. The young Bill Douglas first lived with his maternal grandmother. Their circumstances were desperately poor. David Brown, Douglas's childhood friend, recalls that "Their house was bare, bare essentials, hardly any furniture. The film [*My Childhood*] portrayed what it looked like...People used to have to give him clothes. Sometimes he used to have no socks, just his big pair of boots that he got on" (DVD Trilogy). Even as a young child, Bill performed any odd job or task that might earn a few pennies for survival. When his grandmother died, Bill was sent to live with his cruel paternal grandmother, under whom he suffered emotional and physical abuse (Noble, 1993, 14). Bill's only refuges in his adolescence were local theatrical productions in which he played an active role as an actor and set designer, and the local cinema. Movies were an escape and a growing obsession; Douglas remembered, "There was never any money to buy a ticket. Still, there were ways. I could get into the Pavilion or The Flea Pit, as we called it, for the price of two jam-jars, washed or unwashed... Sometimes, when I could not find any jars, I had to sneak in by a side door" (Noble, 1993, 15-16). The dream worlds of Hollywood provided Douglas with solace throughout his difficult childhood, and, fortunately, they sustained him into a more positive adulthood.

Service in the Royal Air Force proved a significant turning point in Bill Douglas's life. In 1955 he was sent to the Suez Canal Zone, and this enabled escape from the terror of his life with his grandmother Douglas. There he met his closest friend and companion, Peter Jewell, who was English, cultured, a film enthusiast, and a sympathetic ear for the inward-drawn Douglas (Noble, 1993, 17). In Egypt, Douglas and Jewell became dear friends and made plans to live together in London when their military service ended. The Jewell family also embraced Douglas, giving him the love and acceptance he never received from his biological relations.

A second major turning point for Douglas occurred one Christmas with the Jewells. As he opened one particularly important gift, Douglas recalled “Inside the crate lay all the 8mm equipment any film-maker could wish for. There was a camera, film, projector, editor, splicer, titler –everything. I wandered the streets filming everything I could set my eyes on, zooming, tilting, panning, whizzing, rarely static, learning from my mistakes” (Noble, 1993, 17). Douglas was reborn as a filmmaker, and with Peter Jewell’s encouragement (and money), he was accepted to the London Film School in 1968<sup>7</sup> (Noble, 1993, 21).

The 1960s were an educational time for Douglas and Jewell, who saw many classics of world cinema that expanded their appreciation and knowledge of film. Douglas also studied acting at the Theatre Workshop at Stratford East, and began writing scripts (Noble, 1993, 19-20). By the time he entered the London Film School, he was a maturing artist with a strong creative vision. The short films he made there were key to his career, but also to Scottish cinema because he developed his skills and a style that manifested itself in the most famous Scottish art films of all time.

Douglas’s short but productive stint at the London Film School yielded three short fiction student films. Douglas’s work on these short films achieved several key accomplishments. First, the short fiction format trained and developed Douglas for future filmmaking. Though he was notoriously difficult to work with because he demanded that the screen yield precisely the images in his head, his distinctive style was developed in film school and on the short fiction films he made there. Douglas’s films are notable for long takes and stillness, precise framing of objects and characters within the mise en scene, and extreme attention to details. His background

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<sup>7</sup> Legend has it he lied about his age to convince the school he was younger than he was in order to increase his chances of admission (Noble, 1993, 21).

in theater also proved influential as each set piece in the *Trilogy* and *Comrades* was adjusted and readjusted to match his vision, often to the frustration of his crews.

Second, Douglas's short films served as a form of currency and as a calling card for larger projects, specifically at BFI. "Come Dancing" was Douglas's final student film, and it caught the eye of BFI Head of Production, Mamoun Hassan. This led to Douglas's big break and the production of the *Trilogy*. In fact, the first two of the films within the *Trilogy*, *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*, could be classified as short films. *My Childhood* is only 46 minutes long, and *My Ain Folk* is 55 minutes. However, they are not often considered as such because they are combined with *My Way Home* to form the epic, three-hour *Trilogy*. The first two films' running times are at the edge between short and feature films, though they do stand on their own if viewed separately. This begs some speculation that possibly Scotland's greatest art film director was really a short film director. Of the eight total films he directed from his film school days to his passing, six could be considered short films based on length. The two shorter entries in the *Trilogy*, *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*, combine with *My Way Home* in order to make up the lauded *Trilogy*, though it is rarely if ever referred to as a cohesive collection of two short films and a feature. I believe a prejudice against short films is at work here in terms of marketing and critical evaluation that ignores Douglas's mastery of the short film, as if somehow his value as a filmmaker would be less if he were thought of as a director of shorts.

The short films created by Bill Douglas in film school brought about the development of that mastery, including his visual style and his themes on class, complex relationships between men, and a very unflattering vision of post-war Scotland. The *Trilogy* fully realized both Douglas's style and thematic concerns, but "Come Dancing," with its contemporary setting, homosexual subject matter, and depiction of emotional and physical violence would not have fit

in with the vision of an organization like Films of Scotland. Also, Douglas also began writing the *Trilogy* while in film school, and soon after graduating in 1969 with first class honors discovered the difficulties in attaining support for his future filmmaking. *My Ain Folk* assistant producer Charles Rees, referring to Douglas's difficulties with funding the *Trilogy* before BFI's support, stated that

I believe they were still in that stage of selling Scotland with pretty lochs and tartans and the beautiful heather and, I don't know, the deer. The idea that this was the other extreme, this was poverty and grubbiness and watching the film was sort of like being dragged down into this destitution. So, they couldn't make that leap because they thought 'This isn't the Scottishness we want to promote (DVD Special Feature).

Indeed, in a letter from Forsyth Hardy (the longtime director of Films of Scotland) to Douglas, dated June 25, 1971, states that the script for *Jamie* (later to retitled *My Childhood*):

certainly suggests a nostalgic film about a bit of Scotland which is disappearing. I hope the BFI confirm their support to you. It is only fair to say without delay that it is not a subject in which the Films of Scotland Committee would be interested. One of our main concerns is to project a forward-looking country and – although it is no criticism of the film as a film - this would not do so (DVD Special Feature).

Film school provided the immersion and training Douglas needed to develop as a filmmaker, and his short films forged a style that came to be Scotland's first recognized art cinema.

Douglas's struggles to move forward with the *Trilogy* near the end of his film school career and after indicate other aspects of the difficulties of Scottish filmmaking at the time. Not only was Scotland a minor player in the British film industry, but some filmmakers encountered resistance from within what little filmmaking establishment that existed. The failure of Films of Scotland to support Douglas's talent because of their "forward-looking" agenda drove Douglas to the BFI which was less concerned about "positive" images of Scotland. This kind of mishandling of home grown talent had occurred before, with John Grierson's repeated rejections of Margaret Tait, and the astounding manner in which Enrico Coccozza fell through the cracks.

Bill Douglas's fate may have been similar to Coccozza's and Tait's if not for Mamoun Hassan at the BFI. Thus, if there was no such thing as a "Scottish film," or no Scottish film industry with homegrown talent, some of the blame also lies with the Scottish film establishment. Ironically, it was not until the development of film schools in England, and the later advancement of television and public funding for filmmaking (much of it originating in England), that Scots penetrated the wider English-speaking sphere of the film industry.

**"Come Dancing"** directed by Bill Douglas

1970, 13:21 minutes, Black and White, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Script and Direction:* Bill Douglas

*Producer:* Temmi Lopez

*Camera:* Hassan Sharock

*Lighting:* Mel Puig

*Editor:* Hasnath Majumdar

*Assistant Editor:* Bill Hodgson

*Sound:* Jack Gardner

*Principal Cast:*

Clive Merrison as Visiting Man

Michael Elwick as Local Man

Nicole Anderson as Woman in café

Verity Bargate as Young woman

*Production Information and Context:* “Come Dancing” was the last film Bill Douglas made at the London Film School, and it is significant for several reasons. Douglas’s filmmaking style matures in this short, and his later work is recognizable in this instance. His ability to form precise compositions within the frame, and linger on specific moments and beats within the narrative clearly foreshadow the *Trilogy*’s long takes and rich compositions. This is evident in the staging and framing of the final sequence of “Come Dancing.” When the Visiting Man acts as if he is about to urinate, he reveals a phallic-looking knife from beneath his hand near his genitals. The close up of this knife and its movement to the mid-section of the Local Man is precisely staged to be both threatening and highly sexual. “Come Dancing” also makes apparent Douglas’s understanding that short films are good at emphasizing and lingering on specific moments and at creating contemplative states for the audience through editing and framing. The bored malaise of the Visiting Man at the beginning of the film is expressed through long takes of the Visiting Man looking in the mirror. He plays with his hair, finally puts on a bike helmet, indicating possible narcissism and aimlessness. Peter Jewell points out, with “Come Dancing,” “His [Douglas’s] distinctive style is instantly recognizable, whereas earlier student exercises, and the 20 ‘home movies’ that we made on 8mm are ‘rubbish’ – his words – dismissed as an ‘apprenticeship’ that taught him ‘what not to do’” (25). This film was the culmination of Douglas’s education at the London Film School, and it was well-received. Mamoun Hassan, Head of Production at the BFI, saw it and recognized Douglas as a talent. Hassan’s support enabled the production of *The Trilogy*. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that without “Come Dancing,” it is highly unlikely that *The Trilogy* would have been made.

It is well-known that Douglas preferred to mix professional and non-professional actors, and, as in *The Trilogy*, “Come Dancing” features both. The male actors are professionals, and the



London Film School aided casting. The female actors were both neighbors of Douglas and Jewell. Verity Bargate also appeared in “Striptease,” another of Douglas’s student short films (Jewell, 25). Short films often rely on non-professional actors, which sometimes leads to the critique of poor performances, but in many cases this kind of casting adds a certain realism, or immediacy to a project. Indeed, the impression viewers routinely get from watching Douglas’s films include a rawness not often achieved with polished, professional actors.

While Douglas used actors of varying experience levels, the London Film School provided Douglas with a more advanced set of filmmaking tools and a larger crew than virtually all of the independent artists and cinema clubs. 16mm black and white film (as opposed to 8mm), sync sound, and dialog help make “Come Dancing” as technically proficient as many European art films of the 1960s. Jewell notes that Douglas wrote the script in the format required by the London Film School, but that was the only time he wrote a script in such a format (26). Though he rejected many of the Hollywood and classical narrative devices, film school provided Douglas with good technical tools, a crew, and, eventually, contacts that he would for use the remainder of his career.

“Come Dancing” was filmed at Southend Pier in London in the middle of winter 1969-1970 (Jewell, 25). This makes it the first of the films in this study to *not* use Scotland as a location. However, this is a result of the fact that most student films are shot near the location of the film school because, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s, few student productions had the funds to travel extensively for location shooting. Nevertheless, the desolation of an offseason vacation spot in “Come Dancing” in some ways matches the desolation of the small mining village in *The Trilogy*. The ways Douglas framed and amplified that desolation in “Come

Dancing” foreshadows his later work, too, and it remains a rarely screened but intriguing early work by one of the most important Scottish filmmakers.

*Plot Summary:* Jazz music plays over the title screen and the audience is introduced to the young, male protagonist, known only as Visiting Man. He dwells, restlessly, in a small room and throws a dart at a map on his wall. A close-up shot shows the dart lands on a spot in the South End. The Young Woman lounges in a chair. Visiting Man combs his hair while the Young Woman runs her fingers through her hair. Visiting Man looks at himself in the mirror, but as he moves we see the Young Woman in the doorway. She leaves and he puts on a bike helmet. This mostly silent, enigmatic introduction cuts to a shot of a soaring seagull. Here we are introduced to the Local Man, whose hands are outstretched, and he looks at the camera and begins to flap his arms like wings, laughing maniacally or drunkenly. He urinates off the pier.

Inside a Southend pier café, the waitress, known as Woman in Café, watches ballroom dancing on television – in fact it is the TV series, *Come Dancing*. Visiting Man sits at a table drinking a cup of coffee or tea, then spits it back into the cup. He folds a paper airplane and throws it at the waitress, but she is too preoccupied by the television to notice. The Local Man enters and walks up to the counter. The waitress pays him no attention until he taps a coin on the counter. He orders a cup and sits at a table. The Visiting Man attempts to make a paper boat and float it in his cup. Close ups of the eyes and faces of the two men signify potential attraction. The Local Man walks over to the Visiting Man and asks for a light. In opposing high and low angle shots, the Visiting Man strikes a match and declines a cigarette for himself. The Local Man begins to walk away, but instead sits down next to the Visiting Man. The Local Man says, “I used to like making boats. I don’t know why. I never could make them float.” They both laugh at the waitress. The Local Man lights a cigarette for the Visiting Man with his own cigarette. The

Visiting Man asks, “Where is everybody, then? This place is like a morgue.” The Local Man replies, “Booking up for the summer.” The Visiting Man asks where all the “life” is around here, while the Local Man tells him, “Depends what you’re looking for. There’s a strip joint.” The Visiting Man whispers something to the Local Man and they giggle. They stand up to leave and yell “Fire!” as they run out of the café. The waitress does not respond.

As the two run around on the pier together they wrestle and yell at the seagulls. The Visiting Man steals the Local Man’s cigarette lighter and runs a short distance away. He shouts, “Come on, look. I see through it. I don’t know. Put your hot tips to mine and take down your drawers slowly, eh? Is that it?” dea of a gay pickup and then laughs. He says, “I think I’ll piss. Coming?” The Visiting Man urinates near the water’s edge and invites the Local Man over. A ship’s horn blows insistently through the scene. Local Man walks up to Visiting Man as we see a close up of the Visiting Man’s hands near his crotch and he slowly reveals a knife. The Visiting Man touches the knife to the Local Man’s coat and says, “You fucking queer! I loathe your type. I loathe the way you walk, you talk, the smell. It’s wrong!” The Local Man, at first frightened, smiles, and then laughs. Visiting Man slowly puts the knife away, then runs off. A medium shot of the Local Man reveals his smiles turning to anguish, and the film cuts to shots of the waves crashing against the posts of the pier.

*Analysis:* This rarely screened film by Bill Douglas remains difficult to access, a fate many short films share, even those by acclaimed directors. It is not available streaming online, and its only DVD release is part of a Region 2 DVD set of *The Trilogy* which includes “Come Dancing” as a special feature. It is also available at the Bill Douglas Centre at University of Exeter on a Beta SP tape. As a result of this limited availability, many who are familiar with Douglas and *The Trilogy* and *Comrades* are unfamiliar with his short films. This is unfortunate

as it leads to an incomplete understanding of Douglas's filmography and a shortened view of his evolution as a filmmaker.

"Come Dancing" reflects Douglas's obsession with world cinema at the time, especially European art cinema. Peter Jewell admits as much when he writes that the film is "in part, inspired by an Italian film that we both loved, Guiseppe Patroni's *Grifi's Il Mare*... The action is set on Capri in the middle of winter; "Come Dancing" is set on the end of Southend Pier in the middle of winter (1963)" (Jewell, 25). Indeed, Douglas's affinity for European cinema is noted by those who study *The Trilogy*. Long takes, characters without clear motivations, and symbolic imagery are evident in "Come Dancing" and Douglas's later films.

A number of motifs in "Come Dancing" foreshadow Douglas's subsequent work. Sudden and unexpected violence, or threats of violence, are seen in this film. For example, playful roughhousing turns sinister when the Visiting Man threatens to attack with his knife. Both characters are unwilling or unable to express themselves articulately, and they amble about the area without clear destinations. Malaise, frustration, and random violence or harshness certainly characterize this and other Bill Douglas films, but the short film format in particular forces the audience to contemplate those difficult moments because of a lack of exposition and conventional plot devices.

Additionally, this film deals more explicitly with issues of sexuality than Douglas's other films. On first glance, it appears to be a gay pickup gone wrong, with the Visiting Man luring the Local Man into a potentially deadly trap. But there is a significant amount of ambiguity in the depiction of the two characters to question that seemingly straightforward narrative. The Visiting Man may have latent homosexual desires; he leaves/rejects the attractive, nearly naked Young Woman in his room at the beginning of the film. He also appears to enjoy the company of the

Local Man as they prank the waiter and wrestle on the pier. In the end, he is unable to act on his violent plan, perhaps because he identifies with the Local Man. The Visiting Man's homophobic rant is undercut by the Local Man's smiling reaction to it – does the Local Man recognize the Visiting Man's closeted feelings? The second-to-last shot is a medium shot of the Local Man, in obvious emotional pain after the Visiting Man runs away. Is he sad because of a missed potential romantic encounter or relationship? Do the shots of the Visiting Man running away at the end of the film signify confusion regarding his sexuality; a “running away” from his own homosexuality? Douglas's personal life was very private, but he never married and lived with Peter Jewell for over thirty years. Jewell denies that they were a romantic couple, and insists that Douglas was heterosexual, yet he had no long term romantic relationships with any women.

Regardless of Douglas's sexuality, his long-term partnership with another man certainly rejects key aspects of a heteronormative lifestyle. Perhaps reflecting that, Douglas's films explore complicated and conflicted relationships between and among men. The most significant relationships in all of his films are between male characters- the Visiting Man and the Local Man in “Come Dancing,” Jamie and his brother in *My Childhood*, Jamie and the German prisoner of war in *My Ain Folk*, Jamie and Robert in *My Way Home*, and the fellowship of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in *Comrades*.

Though the characters in “Come Dancing” are not explicitly Scottish, the film is made by a Scot with a complex vision of sexuality. This short film about a brief and confusing encounter illustrates the ways short films can dwell on particular moments in order to contemplate and complicate issues like sexuality without coming to definite conclusions or easy understandings of those moments. It may be that the Visiting Man's self-loathing prompts his homophobic acts, but that is not clear – he may just be bigoted and bored. The shots of the Visiting Man throwing a

dart at a map indicates some level of a liminal existence; he is neither here, nor there, nor does it matter where he goes. The ambiguity of this short film forces the viewer to analyze each beat and each moment.

In terms of filmmaking context, “Come Dancing” marks a new way forward for Scottish films and filmmakers by the 1970s. The London Film School provided Douglas with an opportunity to make films, and he was fortunate to get the attention from Mamoun Hassan that propelled the rest of his career. As the 1970s continued into the 1980s, more and more Scots would seek out film school and filmmaking training programs in order to make films. No longer were self-funded projects or the local film club the only options. Short films, too, began to be seen as calling cards for various film industries. The proliferation of film festivals and advancements in television also meant that short films were able to re-find a fraction of the audience that frequently saw studio shorts almost two decades earlier. In the years to come, Scottish short fiction films were essential in the creation of a proto-Scottish national film industry because many of Scotland’s most well-known filmmakers began with acclaimed short films, often made while in film school. Finally, the fictions of the short films in Scotland contributed to an assertion of a Scottish cultural independence in the 1970s and 1980s along with Scottish literature, theater, and visual arts.

#### **Chapter IV: (Re)Inventing a Scottish Cinema, 1980-1997**

The period 1980-1997 saw some significant shifts in the way short films were made and how they functioned in Scotland. Generally, more public funding options and resources for higher production values altered the short filmmaking landscape. Instead of amateurs fending for themselves or participating in clubs, more public support and industry connections led to short fiction films that raised the status of Scottish filmmaking. Later in this period, short filmmaking came to be vital to the project of building a Scottish national cinema by providing directors with experience and overall wider exposure of Scottish filmmaking. All the while, contemporary issues like poverty, de-industrialization, masculinity, and more were explored in these films by Scots with various subjectivities.

These changes took place amidst a contentious social and political climate detailed below that spurred many Scottish creative arts. With regard to short films, the key developments included the rise of video, film schools, and the use of the short film as a foundation for a national cinema. Ultimately, public investments in film and television production both increased the exposure of many Scottish short films, and trained filmmakers who went on to create many of the films in the 1990s that are referred to as the New Scottish Cinema. Where Scottish short films in previous decades were extremely obscure and few Scottish filmmakers were able to screen their work outside of their home regions, this era exemplifies how short films develop of feature filmmakers. At the same time, filmmaking clubs and societies declined slowly, but inexorably. It is likely that the disconnect between film clubs and film schools and official, public initiatives resulted in the reduced importance of social and communal aspects of filmmaking. In other words, rather than join a filmmaking society or strike out alone, filmmakers

were lured by the promise of higher production values, wider exposure, and even television viewings that new training and funding bodies were able to provide.

### Setting the Scene

The failed devolution vote and the election of Thatcher and the Tories in 1979 inspired some of Scotland's most incisive art and fictions of the 1970s and beyond. The 1970s also saw the Scottish people increasingly at odds with the governments in Westminster, and this continued over the next twenty years. On March 1, 1979, Scots voted on a referendum that proposed the establishment of a devolved Scottish assembly, granting more local authority and a measure of independence from London in certain matters. Historian T.M. Devine notes a slim majority of voters cast ballots in favor of the referendum<sup>8</sup>, but that outcome was nullified by a requirement that 40 percent of the total registered electorate must vote "yes" (588). In fact, less than a third of the electorate voted "yes," because only 63.8 percent of eligible Scottish voters actually cast a ballot (588). As a result, the referendum failed on a technicality and the will of the voters was denied. This result led to controversy. Devine argues that such a slim majority was no mandate for Home Rule (588). In contrast, Duncan Petrie summarizes his view: "While some critics have regarded the result as a collective failure of nerve on the part of the Scottish electorate, others have noted the manner in which this negation of the democratic will, however marginal the result, became transmuted into a straightforward rejection of devolution" (2004, 2). In general, opponents of Home Rule used this vote to marginalize the actual outcome. Countering that, the Scottish National Party conducted a "Scotland Said Yes" campaign, but this yielded little as Scots were too divided on a constitutional change that would have been the most radical since

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<sup>8</sup> 51.6 percent for "yes," 48.4 percent voted "no" (Devine, 588).



the Union of 1707 (Devine, 589). Significant devolution would not occur for nearly twenty years after the 1979 vote.

Devine attributes the referendum debacle to a number of factors. He notes that a “nationalist tide had been rising in 1977 and the SNP did well in the district elections of that year,” but by 1978 Labour gained some victories over the SNP, and support for devolution and/or independence remained mixed, or lukewarm. In 1978 polls showed that Scots were most concerned with “strikes, industrial relations and unemployment, and a mere 5 percent of those interviewed gave any priority to devolution” (Devine, 589). 1978 was also the last time the Tories did well overall in the polling in Scotland, and they fervently opposed devolution. Then came the “Winter of Discontent” in 1978-1979 which included a series of UK labor disputes, including the Dustmen’s strike in February 1979. Most of the Tories’ support evaporated in Scotland at this time, and nearly forty years later the Conservative Party remains as unpopular as ever with the vast majority of Scots.

The “Winter of Discontent” was followed by events that could be considered a Spring of Disillusionment for Scotland. In May 1979, Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party won the general election, an outcome *not* endorsed by the vast majority of the Scottish electorate. In fact, the Tories received less than one-third of the total Scottish vote (Petrie, 2004, 3). The policies of the Thatcher Government over the next decade-plus are well-documented, and their effects on Scotland were devastating. Generally, Thatcher pursued deregulation, greater free enterprise, and reductions of public spending in efforts to increase the UK’s economic independence and chip away at the welfare state created in the wake of World War II. Deregulation and reductions in public spending hit Scotland particularly hard, as Scots relied on heavy industries like coal, steel, and shipbuilding. Petrie points out that by 1986, unemployment

in Scotland was at 14 percent, compared to the overall UK average of 11.4 percent (2004, 3). Like the Depression of the 1930s, Scots suffered disproportionately more than the rest of the UK in the late 1970s and 1980s. One effect of this was an increasing sense of a “national consciousness” among Scots, as Petrie describes it, opposed to Thatcherism and its values (2004, 3). The government in London seemed less responsive and alien in its agenda, and Scottish art of all kinds was stimulated by these hard times.

However, the question of Scottish national culture in recent decades is not as simple as a base opposition to London or England or a “British continuum,” to use Wallace’s term (1). Cairns Craig argues regarding the idea of a Scottish cultural tradition, “the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the past, a dialogue which is unique to that particular place” (31). Scotland’s growing distinctness from the rest of the UK in the 1970s and 1980s was not based on notions of ethnic or racial purity, but a dialog related to values and the roles of community and the individual. For instance, a traditionally Scottish emphasis on community<sup>9</sup> increasingly contrasted with the individualistic attitude and policies of the Thatcher administration.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Scottish fictions flourished in reaction to Thatcherism. As we will see below, short films by independent artists and amateur clubs dealt with issues like unemployment, deindustrialization, and the government’s failure to address them. Other arts like literature, film, theater, television, and poetry did the same. Wallace contends that, regarding literature in particular, Scots asserted their “claim to cultural autonomy against the forces of assimilation to an English or British continuum” (1993, 1). Wallace points to Alasdair Gray’s

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<sup>9</sup> Education and government-based care for the poor and elderly were hallmarks of Scottish society and tradition going back before the 1700s.

novel, *Lanark*, as a landmark that is worthy of earlier achievements like *Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) and *Sunset Song* (1932). *Lanark* is notable for its synthesis of fantasy and realism, yet it is faithful to a specifically Scottish tradition and Scottish locations (1993, 3-4). Some even referred to it as the Scottish *Ulysses* for its use of locality (Wallace, 1993, 4). Internationally acclaimed works by James Kelman, Iain Banks, and later Ian Rankin, Janice Galloway, and Irvine Welsh contributed to what some called a “Scottish Renaissance,” not only of the novel, but all manner of fictions (Wallace and Stevenson, Petrie). By the early 1990s, one could speak of a distinct Scottish novel and a Scottish publishing industry, where before one would only refer to the “English” or “British” novel or publishing industry. Around the same time as Wallace’s analysis, critics began to hail a new Scottish cinema as well.

The groundwork for a more vital Scottish cinema<sup>10</sup> – and by “cinema” most critics mean feature-length fictional works – was laid by Bill Douglas’s monumental *Trilogy* and even more so by Bill Forsyth’s low budget comedies, which crossed over into the mainstream. In particular, *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) and *Gregory’s Girl* (1981) catapulted Forsyth to the London and Hollywood industries. His comic portrayals of the struggles of working class youth in modern, urban Scotland forced the establishment to pause and consider independent Scottish filmmaking. For the first time, feature-length fictional films made in, by, and about Scots were completed and acclaimed. However, a number of other forces enabled Scotland’s rising cinematic profile, and they contributed significantly to a more full realization of a new Scottish cinema. These included new avenues of exhibition, public funding schemes, and short films with higher production values and wider viewership than previously in Scottish film history.

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<sup>10</sup> As previously stated, this work argues that there has always been a Scottish cinema if short fiction films are included.

## The Developments of 1982

In the early 1980s, Scotland suffered under Thatcher, but some of the conditions for filmmaking actually improved. A few Scots had access to new funding sources, British television expanded, and training programs and film schools continued to grow. Yet, Scots still did not have a film school of their own, and very few Scottish filmmakers became feature directors. Interest in cinema clubs waned somewhat after decades of serving as a top option for many, as young filmmakers sought out more formal education. For amateurs, cheaper and easier-to-use VHS and digital formats came to replace more complicated celluloid equipment, altering the purpose of many film clubs, which originally provided instruction and training, and no longer found that an essential part of their missions.

New sources of funding and training were the key to Scottish filmmaking in the 1980s. In 1982, the Scottish Film Production Fund was established, but its aims and resources were very modest. David Hutchison points out that the SFPF was established “under the auspices of the state-financed Scottish Film Council, an organization whose remit included exhibition (it could claim much credit for the establishment of a network of arthouse cinemas in the country), archiving and media education)” (2015, 20). The amount of money available for film production was only £80,000 (Hutchison, 2015, 20). Clearly, this could not do much to help feature-length productions, and very little of this money found its way into the hands of short fiction filmmakers. However, as television expanded with Channel 4 and Comataidh Telebhisein Gaidhlig (the publicly funded Gaelic Television Committee), the SFPF grew to almost £750,000 available annually by the mid-1990s (Hutchison, 2015, 20). As was stated earlier, the British Film Institute was able to provide some modest assistance for a few filmmakers at this time, notably Bill Douglas, but there were others. Hutchison also lists the National Film Finance

Corporation (1949-85) as another source for the occasional Scottish project (2015, 20). These were baby steps in creating a homegrown film industry, though Scotland's public financing for filmmaking lagged proportionately, and still lags behind other countries. For instance, Hutchison notes that in 2012 Canada's Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board had combined budgets of about \$170 million of public money for filmmaking. A proportional amount of public spending on film in Scotland would be about £17 million (2015, 20). Sadly, short filmmakers have always received relatively few of the limited public funds available, in part because short films have almost no hope of making large profits. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, Scottish filmmakers have technically had access to both Scotland-specific film funds (such as the Scottish Film Production Fund, and later the Glasgow Film Fund) as well as British public funds (from the BFI and Channel 4, for example). The finances of Scottish short filmmaking intertwined with both English and Scottish sources from the 1980s and onward, proving ultimately to be a significant and complicated development.

The expansion of television in the early 1980s was crucial for Scottish cinema's growth. In 1982, Channel 4 began broadcasting. Its program, *Film on Four*, created films for both television and cinemas. A number of Scottish films were produced for *Film on Four*, including *Ill Fares the Land* (1982), *Another Time, Another Place* (1983), and *Heavenly Pursuits* (1986) (Hutchison, 2015, 20). These were not short films, but *Film on Four* was a chance for some Scottish filmmakers to reach a wider audience than ever before. The BBC also started to back feature films after its long-running original dramas *Wednesday Play* (1964-70) and *Play for Today* (1970-84) ended. Scots like Peter McDougall with *Just Another Saturday* (1975) and *Just a Boy's Game* (1979) found opportunities for funding with the BBC. As the 1990s and 2000s unfolded, the BBC became a co-financier of several Scottish projects by Lynne Ramsay, Ken

Loach, and John Madden. Eventually, high quality short films from Scotland found their way onto Channel 4 and other stations. However, for most short filmmakers in the early 1980s, still toiling in their cinema clubs or at the London Film School, broadcast screenings of their films was a hope for the future.

The kickoff of the Scottish Film Training Trust in 1982 marked the third extremely important event of that year in the history of Scottish film. Even though unemployment was on the rise in Scotland, and the heavy industries on which its economy was so dependent continued to decline, the film and television industry began to grow very modestly. A university film school in Scotland was still years away, as were funding schemes specifically targeted for short films. Nevertheless, the Scottish Film Training Trust made positive steps toward advanced training of Scots in film and television, and its resources increased the production values of several short films.

### The Scottish Film Training Trust

The Scottish Film Training Trust was one of the first home-grown publicly funded programs Scotland endeavored, and its significance lies in its support of young filmmakers and the production of higher production value short films. Its origins begin in the late 1970s. According to the First Annual Report in 1983, the Trust grew from the Scottish Film Production Training Scheme, founded in 1978. According to the document,

At that time the freelance sector of the Scottish film industry had become concerned at its shortage of recruits committed to working at a highly competent level in the technical grades. A joint ACTT/Scottish Film Council initiative resulted in the new scheme, which took on two people annually and for the first few years was self financing (United Kingdom, 1).

This was a positive development, but it was not enough. The report contends that “gaps in film training and in production remained to be filled. On the one hand shortage of funds prevented the managers of the training scheme providing recruits with as broad a spectrum of training as they would have preferred” (1). Other Scots needed their funds, too, including those attending the National Film and Television School, as well as established filmmakers in Scotland interested in in-service training. As filmmaking expanded in Scotland in the early 1980s, so did the need for training in areas as varied as “Production Management, Accountancy, Video Production and Grip Operations” (1). The Trust was set up to provide a select number of applicants comprehensive training and provide funds and opportunities for others working within or on various projects. The champion of this Trust was Iain Smith, who was able to establish a partnership among Goldcrest Films & Television, Ltd., The Scottish Arts Council, and the Scottish Film Council. Each agreed to pay £5,000 annually for three years into the Trust. The Board of Trustees included nine total members, representing the National Film & Television School, the Association of Cinema, Television and Allied Technicians, and the Scottish Association of Independent Producers (1).

The Trust began cautiously and frugally, funding three full-time trainees, and providing partial support for a number of projects, such as £600 to Mr. Iain Brown to “cover costs of attachment to the filming of ‘Local Hero’” (4) and £2,250 to Mr. Blair Urquhart “to cover tuition fees for the year and assist with subsistence 1982-1983” at the National Film and Television School (4). According to its first annual report, the Scottish Film Training Trust began its first fiscal year with £25,000 and ended with £12,608 (5). In the next few years, the Trust supported individual aspiring filmmakers and several Scottish short films, making it a vital resource and a forerunner of later schemes like Tartan Shorts and Prime Cuts.

As a result of many changes – technological, economic, cultural, and political – public financial support of filmmakers and short filmmaking grew in Scotland at this time. The functions and primary concerns of Scottish short fiction films, however, remained mostly the same in the early 1980s.

There is a distinct continuity with the past in terms of Scottish short films' expression of Scottish subjectivities and contemporary concerns, but in addition to that, an overt attempt to build a national cinema had begun. Short films played a key role. If we follow the timeline, we see that in the 1930s, oppositional filmmaking groups and art students created politically charged films that complemented the progressive theater of the era. Postwar filmmaking emphasized personal experiences of modern life like juvenile delinquency and women's subjectivities. This continued with short filmmaking in the 1970s, as the work of film clubs documented and played with contemporary experience, and many filmmaking artists developed their style by making short films, such as Bill Douglas and Bill Forsyth. By the early 1980s, the sponsored documentary ran its course as the chief genre of filmmaking in Scotland, and filmmakers previously on the margins attempted to fill in some of the gaps. Filmmakers like Bill Forsyth showed that homegrown Scottish comedies and coming of age feature films could succeed on an international scale, and a combination of British and Scottish organizations and entities attempted to replace the sponsored documentary embodied in Films of Scotland. A broad and loose alliance between the BBC, Channel Four, BFI, the National Film and Television School, the Scottish Film Production Fund, and the Scottish Film Training Trust provided some of the means and ways for filmmakers to work. Much of the funding, and many of the efforts, were directed toward short filmmaking in a concerted effort to train filmmakers and create currency, leverage, and contacts within the mainstream filmmaking industries. The long term goal was to



create a film industry within Scotland, and one result of those efforts was that short fiction films increased in technical quality, yet many still engaged with specifically Scottish issues and contemporary experiences like de-industrialization and the maintenance of Gaelic language and culture.

At the same time, not all Scottish filmmakers reaped the benefits of new funding and programs. As short film production expanded into, and became closer to, the mainstream industry, some of its traditional bastions waned. Interest and involvement in filmmaking clubs, like the Dalziel Cine Club and the Edinburgh Cine Society declined as the 1980s and 1990s progressed. Some groups were strongly divided between those working on video formats like VHS (and later digital) and those holding on to celluloid filmmaking. The solo artists, working diligently on film art, like Tait and Coccozza, now more often preferred to learn filmmaking in film school where equipment, training, and fellow filmmakers could help complete projects. With the backing of funding organizations like the Scottish Film Training Trust, filmmakers had access to better film stocks, lights, grip equipment, better trained crews, and more polished actors. Yet as Scottish filmmaking became more successful in the 1990s, concerns began to arise regarding the value of art versus commerce. Would short films become *only* a means to feature filmmaking in the mainstream industry? Could shorts thrive as a form of filmmaking closer to the local and less beholden to commercial interests? The navigation of this tension came to define Scottish short filmmaking by the end of the century and beyond.

One item that is abundantly clear from the study of this period is that without film schools, paths for more public funding, and new avenues of exhibition, it is unlikely the Scottish short film could have made it out of the amateur club. Indeed, the whole of Scottish cinema would have remained at a very low profile. Thus, it was the efforts of those working behind the

scenes of the Scottish Film Training Trust and similar entities that prepared Scottish filmmaking for the limelight a full decade before breakout films like *Shallow Grave*.

The first film examined in this chapter benefited from the aid of the Scottish Film Training Trust, and it was a forerunner of the high production value shorts that would proliferate a few years later. The film is notable for its adaptation of a Scottish short story and its address of contemporary, post-industrial experience and religious decline.

**“The Host”** directed by Pat O’Neill

1988, 12:00 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Producer:* Andrea Calderwood

*Production Co-ordinator:* Sara Barr

*Assistant Director:* Bill Clark

*Lighting/Camera Operator:* Kay Sheridam

*Editor:* Lindy Cameron

*Set Designer:* Cas Stewart

*Art Direction:* Barbara Herman Skelding

*Hair/Makeup:* Brenda Stride

*Production Company:* Last Supper Productions

*Principal Cast:*

Patrick Lewsley as Archie

Daivd Heller as Eddie

Billy Armour as Rab

Ray Jeffries as John

James Boyce as the Barman

Freddie Boardley as Chris

Glasgow Arts Centre Drama Group

*Production Information and Context:* This film received financial support from several sources, including the Scottish Film Training Trust, the Scottish Film Production Fund, the BFI, and BBC Scotland (National Library of Scotland). According to the Scottish Screen Archive, the core creative team made this film while engaged in their year in the Scottish Film Training Trust program. It was distributed at Scottish Regional Film Theatres and entered in the Celtic Film Festival of 1989. The film takes the 1971 Hugh McBain short story, “Supper on the Wall” as its source material (National Library of Scotland).

The choice to adapt Hugh McBain’s work sends a clear message that this is going to be a film with distinctly Scottish concerns. As a founding member of the Scottish Society of Playwrights and the Scottish Society of Composers, the native Glaswegian McBain also lectured at Langside College. A writer and aspiring publisher, McBain was very concerned with local issues and facilitating Scottish art. An April 1994 article in *The Herald* by Lorn Macintyre chronicles his retirement-era quest to start a publishing house in Glasgow, partly by investing thousands of pounds of his own money. Macintyre observes that, “McBain is angry about the publishing situation in Scotland. ‘When you have a manuscript, what do you do with it? You send it where? In Scotland you send it to Edinburgh. There are about a half dozen publishing houses there. Or you send it to London. There’s nothing in the city of Glasgow...Why shouldn’t there be a place in Glasgow, however modest?’” Much the same could have been said about

Scottish film at the time and in the years prior, as Scots attempted to create a bona fide film industry.

The production of “The Host” encountered some difficulties, but their exact nature and their effects on the final film, if any, are not clear. According to the notes at the Scottish Screen Archive, the director, Pat O’Neill, “asked for his name to be removed from the credits as he didn’t feel able to finish the project and felt that it could not be called his work” (National Library of Scotland). The final version of the film does not list a credit for the director, and the reasons O’Neill was not able to finish the film are not recorded in the official archive entry. Nevertheless, the film was finished, and it received a distribution that would have made earlier filmmakers like Coccozza and those at the Dalziel club envious.

This film’s Scotland-wide distribution and festival run certainly showed that the Scottish Film Training Trust was a worthwhile endeavor, and that multifaceted financial support could lead to high production value short films made by Scots, in Scotland, and adapted from a Scottish short story.

*Plot Summary:* The film opens on a shot of a television broadcast of horseracing. Archie, an older gentleman, watches intently at his local pub and celebrates, presumably because his horse wins. We next see Archie alone at home, cleaning up after dinner. He leaves and goes back to the pub. As he sits with his friends, they complain about jobs and politics. After a short while, Archie tells his friends he is expecting company. Before he leaves, he orders a bottle and several other drinks to take home. He stops at a convenience store to buy more supplies for the party.

When Archie arrives home, he unloads the drinks, food, and other miscellany. He arranges twelve bottles of beer, twelve fish dinners, and a half bottle of whisky. In a shot/reverse shot sequence, he begins talking to a large print of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* on his

wall. He addresses Jesus specifically, and asks why some people die and others live. Background whispering and talking fill the soundtrack, implying that Jesus and the Disciples are in the room with Archie, or, at least they are in his mind. He continues to talk to the painting. Archie then falls into a trance, sleep, or death as his voiceover states, “Sometimes I wonder...”

*Analysis:* This film reflects significant developments in the Scottish short film during the 1980s. Up to this point, surprisingly few Scottish short films drew inspiration from their literary cousins. This may be because many filmmakers prefer to produce their own, original stories and that they do not usually have the money to purchase the rights to adapt short stories. Margaret Tait was an exception to this, as several of her films were based on poetry, such as “Colour Poems,” and she also adapted the work of Hugh MacDiarmid. It was not until the 1980s and later, though, that a good number of Scottish short films were based on Scottish short stories<sup>11</sup>. That it took so long for Scottish film to begin to adapt its own strong literary tradition is a symptom of the overwhelming dominance of the documentary and the impoverishment of many independent filmmakers and artists. New and multiple sources of funding made a more ambitious film like “The Host” possible, and viewers will note the large size of the crew and its impressive production values. This film looks and sounds like a Hollywood film with very few marks of the amateur with regard to the visuals or audio. The film appears to be shot on 35mm, as opposed to the amateur club standard 8mm, and the sound is mixed professionally with probable additional dialog recording in post-production. This was far ahead of most amateur clubs, where synchronized sound of any kind was a new capability.

With “The Host,” higher production values, new sources of material, new sources of funding, and a wider release signal the beginnings of a more prestigious Scottish cinema. At the

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<sup>11</sup> This includes at least one feature, *The Acid House* (Paul McGuigan, 1998), an anthology film based on short stories by Irvine Welsh.

same time, the specifics of the film do not disavow its Scottishness. The locations reflect Glasgow, and the characters are clearly recognizable as Scottish. Also at work in this are the legacies of the declines of the economy and Scottish Presbyterianism.

Hugh McBain's short story, like the film, focuses on the internal life of the protagonist, named George in "Supper on the Wall," and Archie in "The Host." In both the film and the short story, issues of faith, loneliness, and working class concerns dominate. Though both the film and story establish George/Archie as a lonely, on-the-edge-of-retirement widower, the short story presents a much more elaborate conversation between Jesus (who speaks Scots) and George. Here George describes his financial difficulties amidst hard economic times. George says, "The Caesar bloke gets far too much out o' us. Fags, beer, the cratur, purchase tax, income tax, pension tax—ach, ye're workin' for peanuts" (102). Later, George requests that Jesus solve some of the problems in London: "I on'y wish ye'd gie me a lend o' it to go down to Lunnon and gie that publican o' ours a good workin' ovr" (102). Jesus responds amicably, "Mebbe I'll do just that, Geordie. I maun be about my faither's business. Right, faither?" (102). The short story ends with Jesus emerging from the wallpaper to eat some fish and drink whisky; then he takes George's hand. The film ends on a close up of Archie, his ultimate fate and the reality of his experiences open to interpretation.

In both texts, a character in a liminal phase of life confronts contemporary and existential problems. George/Archie, seen by his pub friends as eccentric if not a bit mad, is a figure challenged by grief for lost loved ones and difficult circumstances as the social safety net crumbles around him. The film emphasizes existential questions more strongly (as when Archie asks why some people die while others live), though both are caught in a contemporary milieu of 1980s Scotland. George/Archie takes some refuge in his religious beliefs via the wallpaper

mural, but asks hard questions of his own faith. For instance, he makes a request of Jesus: “I want ye to come down and get rid o’ aa they bombs, aa this bitterness in the herts o’ men. Will ye no, Jeez? Better lo’ed ye canna be. Will ye no come back again?” (103). In many ways, both texts are heartbreaking portrayals of loneliness and, possibly, the moments leading up to death. However, both the film and the short story are not hopeless, but open-ended.

As a short fiction film, “The Host” exemplifies many of the positive qualities Raskin attributes to this particular mode of filmmaking. The film balances simplicity and depth, and character and interaction in order to address issues of particular Scottish concern, such as a questioning Presbyterianism and the collapse of the welfare state. Its funding and production context shows how short films can be embraced by national organizations in an attempt to make films and train filmmakers. This film certainly was used as a kind of currency for the mainstream film industry, but it also adds to national culture through its adaptation of a short story by a key twentieth-century Scottish author. At the very least, the film’s production quality and wide release (for a short film) shows how effective the Scottish Film Training Trust was, even if it was somewhat financially limited. “The Host” also shows that the prestige of Scottish short filmmaking, and Scottish filmmaking generally, may be uplifted through strategic team-ups with other organizations like the BBC and the BFI.

### Amateur Filmmaking Clubs in the 1980s

The successes of films like “The Host” and programs like the Scottish Film Training Trust were commendable, but it is key not to neglect those films and filmmakers who did not receive funding and support, or training from a film school. Amateur filmmaking clubs continued into the 1980s and 1990s and produced a significant percentage of Scotland’s fictional

films, yet new challenges and controversies arose. These included new filmmaking methods, declines in participation, and the continued separation from new and promising filmmaking initiatives.

By the beginning of the 1980s, amateur filmmaking clubs were no longer the top option for most Scottish filmmakers. As mentioned above, other funding sources, initiatives, and film schools filled the void left by the end of the sponsored documentary with new fiction films, including shorts. However, film clubs remained the most prolific producers of short fiction films, and by the 1980s two technological changes both aided and caused division amongst the filmmakers. The first was the long-awaited arrival of sync sound capabilities.

Prior to the 1980s, almost all amateur films were silent with music and narration added later. But during the 1982/1983 season, synchronized sound came to amateur productions. Dalziel Cine Club president John Ballantyne's notes that "The club made its first film using single system sound for the Strathclyde Film Event (Theme Inflation). Single system sound had been introduced by Kodak. Pre-stripped Super 8 film was loaded into a camera which had a sound head that recorded live sound. Unfortunately this was 18 frames advanced from the picture so editing was difficult" (Saberton, 7). This was certainly a boon for amateur filmmaking clubs, as the problem of sound dogged them for decades, limiting their ability to stage dramas with dialog. The specter of video also showed up, as Brian Saberton of the Dalziel club documents, during the 1984/1985 season: "Interest in video was beginning to develop but some members resisted changing from film as the quality of the video image at that time was not particularly good and projection systems were not available so the videos had to be viewed on a television set" (7). Video made production easier for groups like Dalziel, but it also caused division between those loyal to the aesthetic of celluloid and those embracing video technology.



This controversy between film and video is reflected in the changes to Scottish filmmaking clubs in the 1980s, and the in-fighting it caused. By the 1989/1990 season, the Dalziel Cine Club members renamed their organization to the Dalziel Cine & Video Club (Saberton, 13). In his documentation of the activities of the Edinburgh Cine Society, Norman Speirs writes that in the 1980s, “At first many members shunned this new medium [video] and would not touch it, but eventually at the AGM in 1990 it was resolved to admit videotape-using members, and our name was officially changed to the ‘Edinburgh Cine and Video Society’” (Speirs, 7). A 1990 editorial in the Edinburgh Cine Society’s journal characterizes the change of the group’s name in this way: “It was a sad day for some of our long-standing members, but the decision was taken on the realistic basis that video is the medium of movie-making most favoured by the current generation of home movie-makers, and it is from their ranks that we must look for the recruitment which will sustain our Society for the next fifty years” (8) The editor attempts to find a middle ground, however, between members’ feelings regarding the film versus video debate by suggesting that it is not an either/or issue: “There is no reason why both media should not only coexist within our Society but also become integrated in their usage, so that the favourable characteristics of both are harnessed to achieve the best possible end results in making movies. Video is the ideal medium for rehearsing [sic] actors, and checking lighting; and camera angles, before the final effort is shot on cine film” (8). Even in a large and well-established group like the Edinburgh Cine Society, video caused some controversy. Rather than using both tools, most members in the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society attended separate meetings for film and video. Ultimately, the film/video dispute was just one of the divisions that contributed to these groups’ ultimate decline.

Even though video and sound technologies made filmmaking (or video-making) easier for amateur film clubs, virtually all of these groups suffered a net loss of members by 1990. During the 1965/1966 season, membership in the Dalziel club peaked at 77 and fluctuated some over the next decade but the overall trend was decline; 27 members in 1976/1977, down to 18 members by 1980/1981, and there it stabilized around 18-24 members into the 1990s (Saberton, 1-16). The Edinburgh Cine and Video Society, formed in 1936, prospered for decades after World War II, with Speirs noting that “Life continued smoothly through the sixties, with our membership reaching 150 – the maximum allowed by our Constitution – and we even had a waiting-list some years” (Speirs, 6). This membership halved by 1996, as Norman Speirs reports “our numbers in the past two seasons just exceed 80, after being static at just over 70 for several years. Losses of established members have been made up by new members, almost all of them users of video equipment” (8). The records indicate a number of possible causes for the declines in membership. One was the deaths of longtime members. For Dalziel, in particular, many of the club’s charter members stayed on for twenty or more years, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, the demographics of the club trended older. Additionally, as video equipment became cheaper and more ubiquitous, fewer people needed to seek out a filmmaking club to access filmmaking tools. Though video was (and some still argue that it is) inferior to celluloid, it came to dominate low-budget and amateur filmmaking from the 1980s and beyond. Also, young, serious filmmakers were more inclined to attempt film school than a film club, as the film clubs were rarely an in-road to the industry. Additionally, new pathways to fiction film and television production in the form of the Scottish Film Training Trust and, later, Tartan Shorts and Prime Cuts proved more attractive to young, fiction filmmakers because they provided money for more elaborate and sophisticated short films than they would have been able to make otherwise. The

opportunities for exhibition provided by those schemes also were vastly superior, as those schemes' films were screened at numerous international festivals, put forward as award contenders throughout the world, and broadcast on BBC television.

In short, the 1980s brought significant change to the amateur film scene in Scotland. Much short filmmaking in Scotland began to look and sound more professional during this period. Better funded short films resulted in period pieces engaging with aspects of Scottish history and contemporary life and overall higher production values. The new options for short filmmakers diminished the importance of filmmaking societies, and this process continued for over two decades. Fiction films made by amateur groups expanded their concerns somewhat, but remained very engaged with the contemporary and local. By the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, it was fair to speculate whether higher budgets and more glamorous options like film schools weakened communal filmmaking and attention to the local in hopes of landing a big deal in the mainstream industry.

The next film shows the potential of amateur film clubs to create incisive short fiction films that deal with the contemporary situation. As a film about crime, unemployment, and misspent youth, the ability displayed here by a small group of filmmakers acting collectively exemplifies Eisenstein's call for short films to have an almost instantaneous response to current concerns.

**“Portfolio to Trouble”** directed by Archie Craig and George Juner

1981, 19:00 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Filmed and Produced by:* Archie Craig and George Juner

*Writer:* George Juner

*Titles:* John Anderson

*Stills:* Douglas Lornie

*Camera:* Archie Craig

*Principal Cast:*

Stuart Fyvie as Peter

John Taylor as Nick

Archie Craig as College Principal

George Juner as Old Man

Alex McMillan, Norman Spiers, Neil Shaw as the Boys in the Pub

*Production Information and Context:* “Portfolio to Trouble” was produced by members of the Edinburgh Cine Society at the beginning of the video era. However, this film was not shot on video but Super 8mm and featured sync sound, a major advancement. The Edinburgh Cinema Society at this time was at approximately 70 members, including several young members (Speirs, 7). Some of these members remained in the Society for a long time, like Norman Spiers, whose writings in *Cine Chat* and involvement with the group continued well into the 1990s.

Craig’s and Juner’s film arrived when serious study of Scottish cinema and Scotland in cinema began to take hold. The debate commenced in earnest during the 1981 Edinburgh Film Festival, which led to the collection of essays, *Scotch Reels* (BFI, 1982). This Colin McArthur-edited book (he also contributed the Introduction and an extensive interview with Forsyth Hardy) serves as a polemic regarding the problems facing filmic representation of Scotland and Scots, as well as Scottish filmmaking from the beginning of the twentieth-century up to the early 1980s. The essays identify and critique the tropes of Tartanry and Kailyard in feature film

representations of Scotland. They also lament the lack of progressive, socialist filmmaking in Scotland and the poor state of Scottish TV (in the early 1980s). *Scotch Reels* proved seminal in that when the New Scottish Cinema arrived in the mid-late 1990s, nearly every piece of writing on Scottish cinema referred to, or engaged with it in some way. *Scotch Reels* certainly aided and inspired closer looks at Scottish film history, yet it did suffer from a few blindspots. The works of Bill Douglas and Bill Forsyth were noticeably absent from discussion in the book, and few films eviscerate Kailyard tropes like *The Trilogy* and *That Sinking Feeling*, so in some respects the writers in the collection avoided films that did not fit their arguments. The contributors to *Scotch Reels* also focused almost entirely on feature length fiction films and documentaries, with only one essay on the Workers Film Societies of the 1930s by Douglas Allen. It is likely the *Scotch Reels* polemicists were not even aware of many of the fiction films made by amateur groups and independent artists, for if they had, they would have seen a much more diverse film culture that engaged with a contemporary Scotland in sometimes brutally honest ways. Cocozza's "Chick's Day" and "Portfolio to Trouble" seem to be the kind of films many of the writers called for. The problem was those films were not well known.

It is in this social and critical moment – the early years of Thatcher's conservative overhaul of the UK and a new critical awareness of, and engagement with, Scottish fictions on film – that the Edinburgh Cine Society made a poignant film about art, unemployment, and violence in contemporary Edinburgh.

*Plot Summary:* The film opens with a long shot of Edinburgh Castle, the city's most famous icon of Scottish royalty and prestige. An opening voiceover briefly discusses the problem of young men and unemployment in Scotland today. Peter, a young man in his late teens, enters Edinburgh College of Art to interview with the college principal regarding admission. His

portfolio of work is impressive, but Peter is rejected anyway. After he leaves the college, his friend, Nick, meets him outside the Black Bull pub. They talk about making a film, but they do not have any money. The boys attend a party at with other young people, and Peter and a red-haired girl talk. Peter and Nick resolve to try to get jobs. The next sequence features a montage of various shops, including art supplies, kitchen specialists, and a fruit stand, but all turn Peter and Nick down. One shopkeeper shouts in his face: “Jobs?! You must be joking! No jobs!” Dejected, the two friends stop for chips at Tony’s Fish and Chicken Bar.

Next we see them drinking a bottle of whisky on the riverbank when they spy an old man leaving his flat. They break in and begin to search for money and goods. Parallel editing shows the boys stealing while outside on the street the Old Man realizes that he forgot something. He unexpectedly walks in on the thieves. They attack him, hitting him with a cane and knocking him unconscious. They grab a tin full of the Old Man’s money and run away. Once they are a safe distance from the crime scene, they look at the money they stole – possibly the Old Man’s entire life savings. Peter feels remorse, takes the tin, and goes back to the flat. He returns the money but finds the Old Man still unconscious and bleeding on the floor. He calls for an ambulance and sits near the victim, showing some tenderness and a willingness to face the consequences of his crimes.

*Analysis:* “Portfolio to Trouble” addresses a number of contemporary Scottish issues, while also performing many of the functions of short films detailed in chapter one. In particular, the interior life of a protagonist in a liminal stage plays out in this film, as do contemporary concerns regarding unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and limited arts funding.

Much like “Chick’s Day,” this film features a young, male protagonist unable to rise above his circumstances due to social and economic conditions. Like that earlier film from over

two decades prior, Peter is a young man on the verge of adulthood. He attempts to follow his talents and lead a productive life by enrolling in the Edinburgh College of Art, but, for reasons the film does not make explicit, he is rejected. The film gives a sense of larger forces at work that are beyond the control of the young protagonist – scholarship funding, school connections, overall economic conditions – but it is the consequences of Peter’s rejection that receive exploration. A single, pivotal day in the life of this youth in which he falls into a pit of crime and an uncertain future emphasizes the importance of seemingly little moments. This again demonstrates the power of the short fiction film to force the audience to pause and consider the significance of the briefest instances, for they frequently shape our lives.

The points at which Peter is rejected from school, and when he and Nick decide to Rob the Old Man are life changing. These are usually not the concerns of the epic Scottish film, with its grand canvas of Tartanry and sweeping scenes of battle and romance. But here, in the amateur, short fiction film, representations of contemporary Scots and issues of pressing importance find a home – something the *Scotch Reels* critics advocated for.

Though “Portfolio to Trouble” focuses on the local and the everyday, the larger issues facing Scotland are revealed, as well. The shopkeeper’s incredulous statement: “Jobs?! You must be joking! No jobs!” is a slightly humorous, but accurate assessment of the situation in Scotland at the time. As the jobless, aimless, and depressed young men in Bill Forsyth’s 1979 film, *That Sinking Feeling* say, “There has to be more to life than suicide.” Yet, what options remain for Peter when he is unable to attend school or find employment? The film partially attributes crime to the failing of social and economic institutions. This causes young, disadvantaged people to make poor decisions. Thatcher’s successful attempts to break unions decimated industries that long formed Scotland’s economic base, depriving many young men of steady employment. Neo-

liberal logics of the late 1970s and 1980s also applied capitalist thinking to areas like art and education, so it is unsurprising that a working class youth like Peter had a difficult time.

The film ultimately gives viewers a sliver of hope, as Peter repents his day of crime. He may suffer harsh punishment, but the film suggests that his criminal activities are over. There is no similar optimism for the larger social and economic forces at work in the film, other than the idea that as a film, “Portfolio to Trouble” could serve to make its audience more empathetic and aware of the problems facing Scotland. In its narrative and as a piece of social critique, the film argues for progressive, personal and social change.

#### The 1990s: Breakthroughs and a New Scottish Cinema

As Duncan Petrie points out, for much of the 1980s, the visible, mainstream Scottish cinema was synonymous with one director, Bill Forsyth (2000, 172). This is because his string of successful, modestly budgeted comedies, including *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), Gregory’s *Girl* (1981), *Local Hero* (1983), and *Comfort and Joy* (1984), achieved international success. Until the late 1990s, the Glasgow-born Forsyth was undoubtedly Scotland’s most well-known filmmaker. Yet one director and a handful of homegrown productions does not a national cinema make. Such a task requires, argues Petrie, “appropriate structures and institutions are needed to provide and maintain the resources for a critical mass of films to be produced, distributed and exhibited on a consistent and regular basis” (2000, 172). Yet the questions of how to achieve that, and what roles short films should play in a new Scottish national cinema remained exigent. At the time, short fiction films were not considered major contributors to a Scottish cinema, and Scotland’s “lack” of a national cinema was asserted mostly on the basis of its dearth of feature-



length fiction film production. At the same time, debates regarding what a Scottish cinema should do, and what it should look like, took place.

In the 1990 book, *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (Scottish Film Council, BFI), John Caughie argues that for a Scottish cinema to exist, it must create “difference.” That is, Scottish cinema should not have a “bland international style,” but rather it should create difference by emphasizing “the importance of the local and the particular – local contexts, particular histories – in which questions of accent, language and landscape take on significance as the signs of difference” (30). Rather than ape Hollywood or mask Scottish accents, locations, and culture, they should be emphasized by a Scottish film industry as a marker of difference for an international audience and as a claim of Scotland’s place in the panoply of world cinemas. Again, we see here a blind spot regarding Scottish artists who had long labored to create short films engaged with the local, Scottish representation, and contemporary culture prior to the 1990s. Indeed, these are chief aspects of short films explored here. I would go further to say that, in general, a nation’s short filmmaking inherently engages with these issues and creates some of the strongest markers of difference from the fictions of other nations. As short filmmaking is a form of filmmaking closer to the people, it is far more likely that the concerns and subjectivities of a nation’s many members will find expression in short films, making them truly valuable if we care about culture and fairer representation of a wide range of filmmakers.

Nonetheless, Caughie finishes his essay by raising a number of hard questions regarding how to construct Scottish representations and build a national cinema (AKA feature-length films for theatrical release) going into the 1990s. Among these include: who gets access to film training and how? What are the proper levels of support needed in Scotland? And, how can this

be economically sustainable? In his analysis of the Scottish Film Production Fund's<sup>12</sup> performance in the 1980s, Ian Lockerbie also discusses the controversy regarding what kinds of films should be made with funds available to Scottish filmmakers. He, unlike Caughie and later Colin McArthur, argues that Scottish films should try for mainstream success and commercial appeal, because, an oppositional cinema should have something to oppose (174). However, Lockerbie also acknowledges that several different kinds of films make up a national cinema. One of his strongest critiques of the SFPF was its lack of support for short filmmaking. He cites a joint venture between the SFPF and Scottish Television, "Happy the Man" (Jim Gillespie, ), as one of the only short films the SFPF supported, and this lack of public funding for short films is a key "missing link" (178).

Colin McArthur made a strong "commerce versus culture" critique of the SFPF and the Scottish Film Council in *Sight and Sound*. McArthur recommended that in order to create a Scottish cinema, attention must be paid to films' cultural functions and not just the commercial and industrial aspects. He attacked a tendency of the SFPF to fund projects that fell in line with a Hollywood mainstream style of filmmaking. McArthur called Scotland, in terms of filmmaking, a "third world country" because so little public money is available for investment in films<sup>13</sup> (30). Also, those developing and supporting feature projects are far too concerned with chasing money from American and pan-European sources. If the film gets made, it might lose claim to its Scottishness because so little of the financing came from Scotland. McArthur suggested that Scotland instead give up its "head-long rush toward an industrial conception of film-making" and instead invest in micro-budget films of £300,000 or less (31). A "poor cinema" such as this could be more sustainable (lower expenses require lower financial returns for a commercial

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<sup>12</sup> The Scottish Film Production Fund will be referred to as the SFPF in subsequent mentions.

<sup>13</sup> At the time, this figure was approximately £250,000 per year (30).

“success”); a wider array of artistic voices could be heard; and this more thoroughly “Scottish” cinema would be supported by engaged journalism and film criticism. McArthur pointed to other world film movements such as the *Nouvelle Vague*, Brazil’s *Cinema novo*, and various Latin American and African cinemas as models for Scotland’s path.

For McArthur, short films may have a role to play in a Scottish national cinema, but not at the expense of features and only if they are made cheaply. In the same essay, he saves his most stinging criticism for a discussion of a new direction for Scottish short films, the Tartan Shorts. As a jointly financed venture from the SFPF and BBC Scotland, Tartan Shorts provided money for three short films per year, budgeted at £30,000 each. The SFPF press release describing Tartan Shorts (cited by McArthur) states that these films are to be “‘narrative shorts’ and it is envisaged that grantees will springboard from the making of a short on to a first feature film” (32). McArthur found this budget appalling, noting that Glasgow filmmakers Douglas Aubrey and Alan Robertson were denied funding from the SFPF to complete their film, *Work, Rest and Play*, a feature-length road movie partially completed but in need of £15,000 more (32). The priority to fund Tartan Shorts, with their aspirations to the major English-speaking film industries, reveals that the controlling powers-that-be in Scotland remained far too committed to mainstream, three-act Hollywood narrative cinema. This is a legitimate fear, but filmmakers are often too rebellious to become slaves to Hollywood formulae. Some Tartan Shorts did bow to Hollywood-style storytelling, but most did not. We will see a couple of examples of films that did not in the coming pages.

In the early 1990s, debates about the makeup of a Scottish national film industry and culture dominated. Amidst the disagreements, increases in funding, entrepreneurship, and changes in filmmaking technology, the roles of short fiction films began to change. Generally,

short fiction films came to be the training ground and the midwife of a larger, and somewhat more mainstream filmmaking scene as the decade wore on. Key to this were various short film schemes, including the aforementioned Tartan Shorts, but also Gear Ghearr (1996-1998, Gaelic language shorts), Prime Cuts (1996-1998), and New Found Land (2000). These schemes shared the SFPF's goal of springboarding filmmakers into feature films, and they all facilitated the production of high quality shorts with expensive film stocks and large and well-trained crews. Very often they featured some of the best Scottish acting talent as well, and the likes of Peter Mullan, Kelly MacDonald, and Kevin McKidd may be seen in these films. At the same time, some of the old amateur filmmaking clubs continued into the 1990s as well, producing short fiction films that did not benefit from the theatrical and television exhibition of the better-funded short films.

The result of these developments was the complicated bifurcation of Scottish short fiction filmmaking in the early 1990s. Rather than a small clutch of amateur artists and clubs producing all of the Scottish film fictions, feature-length fiction films and filmmakers came onto the scene in the late 1970s and 1980s. There would be several more as the 1990s wore on. Also, a number of filmmakers were able to make well-funded and successful short fiction films that did lead to some mainstream success, further separating the amateur clubs from professionals and aspiring professionals making more prestigious short films. For instance, the very first Tartan Short, "Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life" (1993) won the U.S. Academy Award for Best Short Film – Live Action, at the 1995 awards. It was directed by the already well-known Peter Capaldi, who achieved a breakthrough by acting in the 1983 film, *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth). The film was hardly a gamble on an unproven Scottish talent. On the other hand, not every Tartan Short was directed by an established Scottish actor or director, and the seven films made under the Gear

Ghearr scheme filled a longstanding void in Scottish film culture by supporting production of Gaelic-language films.

Colin McArthur's fears of the domination of Hollywood-style storytelling in Scottish national cinema only partially came true in terms of short fiction filmmaking. While the insiders who made decisions about what films to fund included successful and mainstream figures like Bill Forsyth, Mamoun Hassan, Bill Paterson, and Archie Tait, many of the films made under schemes like Tartan Shorts did not so easily comply with the paint-by-the-numbers storytelling propagated by Robert McKee and Syd Field (30). Additionally, short films made with and without the help of funding schemes took on a surprising variety of issues and representations in the 1990s, including Scottish masculinity and Gaelic culture. Such is the case of Martin McCardie's "Initiation," which critiques the "hard man" trope of traditional Scottish masculinity rooted in productive, skilled, physical labor.

**"Initiation"** directed by Martin McCardie

1996, 15:20 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Writer and Director:* Martin McCardie

*Producer:* Angus Lamont

*Director of Photography:* Alan Stewart

*Editor:* James Hamilton

*Designer:* Alan Reid

*Principal Cast:*

Sean McGinley as Arthur Kennedy

Steven Duffy as Luke Kennedy

Laurie Ventry as Metal Worker

Gary Lewis, Frank Gallagher, David McKay, Stevie Hannan, Steve Hotchkiss,

Eric Barlow, and Jim Twaddle as the Workers

*Production Information and Context:* “Initiation” was one of the three short films made under the Tartan Shorts scheme in 1996. Its writer and director, Martin McCardie, made a name for himself as a supporting actor in various television series prior to 1996, including *Strathblair* (1992- ), *Border Warfare* (1990- ), and the TV movie, *Dream Baby* (1989) (IMDB). Later he would act in well known Scottish films directed by Ken Loach and written by Paul Laverty, including *My Name is Joe* (1998) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002), which deal with many of the same themes as “Initiation.” McCardie was well-connected as an actor during the heyday of the New Scottish Cinema, and he also played Angus in *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006). McCardie’s familiarity with many of Scotland’s most prominent actors certainly aided the casting of the well-known Sean McGinley (*Braveheart*, *On a Clear Day*, *Gangs of New York*, etc.) in “Initiation”, and the opportunity to write and direct this film was followed by other writing jobs. These include the McCardie co-creation, *Tinsel Town* (2000-2001), and scripts for episodes of other television series like *Taggart* (1983-2010) and *Katie Morag* (2013- ). Though McCardie was not nearly as famous as Peter Mullan or even Sean McGinley, he was able to parlay his previous work into a chance to direct a well-funded short film that would subsequently receive theatrical and television exhibition.

The production values and profile of a short film like “Initiation” reflect the growth of Scottish cinema after *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994) and *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995). While funds remained limited for feature filmmaking, the various schemes mentioned above

invested in short films created by rising talent, like McCardie, with the hope that directing a short would lead to larger projects. Indeed, directors of Tartan Shorts that went on to much bigger, international work included the likes of Peter Capaldi, Peter Mullan, Lynne Ramsay, Morag McKinnon, and David Mackenzie. Unlike those figures, international recognition eludes McCardie, but his only short film, “Initiation,” proves a valuable entry and a companion to other films about maladjusted and disenchanted young men in Scotland, like *Trainspotting*, which debuted that same year.

*Plot Summary:* Luke Kennedy recently began employment in the cement industry, handling heavy industrial tools and materials. The film opens on Luke as he struggles to keep up with the other workers. They taunt him by yelling, “Daddy’s boy!” and “You work like a woman!” Luke’s father, Arthur Kennedy, also works with them and holds a position of authority, possibly as the manager or owner. The quitting bell rings, and as Luke attempts to leave, his co-workers ambush him and chase him down. The initiation begins.

The workers, all men, grab Luke and carry him over to the conveyor belt, where they restrain and undress him. They take off his pants, and at that moment, his father, Arthur, shouts, “Enough!” Arthur walks over to Luke and continues the initiation by pouring wet cement on Luke’s mid-section and genitals. The imagery and compositions of the shots in this scene strongly echo a traditional religious baptism, with cement replacing holy water. Arthur says to Luke, “You’re a man now.” The cement workers release Luke, and the initiation is complete. However, Luke is humiliated rather than honored, and extremely upset at this treatment. He begins to yell and break equipment. Arthur punches him, and tells Luke that he loves him. He punches him again. The workers watch in shock. The father and son fight, but their brothers-in-industry break it up. Arthur sees that his son is not falling in line with the traditional codes and

rites of the “hard man.” At this moment, Luke rejects his father’s ways, saying “You can’t do anything with me, you’ve lost.” Luke leaves, and the other workers begin to leave, as well. This infuriates Arthur; he rants about how he “made this place;” he’s “a Kennedy.” The final, long shot frames Arthur Kennedy, small and alone in the cement works; his hopes for his son dashed and his ideas of masculinity challenged. The film does not resolve the fate of Luke, Arthur, or the other workers as they amble away, stunned at the conflict and the break with tradition.

*Analysis:* This film critiques traditional ideas of Scottish masculinity as based in productive, physical wage labor. In many cultures, masculine rites of passage are the norm, and they include various practices ranging from religious ceremonies to college fraternity hazings. These initiations are often unpleasant, painful, and humiliating, and they align young men with the culture’s traditional, masculine norms and values. In “Initiation,” the baptism-by-cement, which focuses most upon young Luke’s genitals, signals a moment where he has symbolically earned his manhood in the eyes of his fellow men. However, Luke rejects the initiation instead of enduring and ultimately embracing it, as would be the norm. In doing so, the whole apparatus of traditional manliness as defined by hard, physical labor, and the brotherhood formed by sharing that labor, is disrupted.

The ribbing Luke receives at the beginning of the film from his co-worker’s as they call him “Daddy’s boy” and as they tell him he works like a woman is indeed part of that initiation, but it also results from the fact that he is the boss’s son. His hurt reactions to the insults, rather than witty retaliation, establish early in the film that Luke is not going to be a traditional hard man. The twist of the film, however, is that his co-workers join him in his rejection of the traditional masculinity of his father by walking away from Arthur and looking at him in disgust.



“Initiation” reveals the cruelty and violence that underpins not only many hazings and traditional rites of passage, but also the cruelty and violence of traditional, patriarchal masculinity. When Luke makes it clear that he will not accept the initiation, Arthur becomes extremely violent in an attempt to physically force Luke to conform. In the end, the violence goes too far, and the hard men of the cementworks reject this ugly display. The film does not propose clear alternatives, just a vague sense that there has to be a better way than constant posturing, aggression, and physical confrontation.

Crises of Scottish masculinity dominated many films from the New Scottish Cinema era. It was such a common theme that some critics felt it pushed aside many other valid issues and concerns. Nonetheless, Scottish short films both anticipated and led a discussion of Scottish masculinity at this time, with precursors like “The Host,” then notable Tartan Shorts like “Initiation,” “Duck” (1998, to be discussed in chapter four), and the Prime Cuts short film “The Beauty of the Common Tool” (1996) as prominent examples. As high quality short films made under the auspices of public funding schemes and promoted by Scotland internationally and on the BBC, they mark this period of masculine crisis during the 1980s and 1990s as one of the most pressing national concerns.

In many ways, the short films that dealt with significant changes to male roles in Scottish work and society are artistic, psychological, and philosophical responses to the material conditions that inspire them. The loss of traditional work and industry is the most prominent of all the changes, and that loss is well documented. Devine writes that between 1979 and 1981 Scotland lost 11% of its manufacturing output and one-fifth of its total jobs (592). By 1997, only the Longannet complex remained of the mining industry, which had fifteen active pits as recently as 1977. By the 1990s textiles was all but gone, and the privatization of the British Steel

Corporation led to the closure of the legendary Ravenscraig steelworks in June, 1993 (Devine 592-3). The loss of these long-established industries and their good paying jobs had effects on more than employment statistics. Real living conditions declined for many Scots, and many of the men who found themselves out of work suffered psychologically. The inspirations for short films like “Initiation” come from the mental fallout of changing times. Archie in “Supper on the Wall” and the protagonist in “The Beauty of the Common Tool” find themselves obsolete and their life’s work suddenly gone, or for naught. These feelings inspire spiritual and psychological angst. “Initiation”’s Luke, raised during the decline of industry and its codes of male labor and solidarity, rejects his father’s ways as backwards rather than empowering. Arthur’s world is disrupted beyond recognition; his son’s rejection of masculine rites undermines the power structures that kept industry in order. The younger generation, represented by Luke, may not be comfortable with the ways of the “hard man” and its rigidity, but (in 1996) no obvious alternate routes present themselves, either. If Arthur feels rejected and obsolete by the end of the film, Luke finds himself in a limbo. The film’s unresolved ending marks the ways Scottish masculinity was unmoored by the loss of productive wage labor, and the uncertainty during this time.

While many Scottish short films of this period focused on the here and now, some looked back to the distant past in order to unearth experiences, stories, and even language. In doing so, this era produced a number of Gaelic-language films, including “Sealladh/The Vision” (Douglas Mackinnon, 1992), and the next film up for analysis, “An Iobairt/The Sacrifice,” directed by Gerda Stevenson.

**“An Iobairt (The Sacrifice)”** directed by Gerda Stevenson

1996, 25:00 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Director:* Gerda Stevenson

*Writer:* Aonghas MacNeacail

*Producers:* Catherine Aitken, Kenneth MacQuarrie, Lucy Conan

*Camera:* David Flett

*Editor:* Fiona Macdonald

*Music by:* William Sweeney

*Principal Cast:*

Ceit Kearney

Domhnall Ruadh

*Production Information and Context:* “An Iobairt” was the first film supported by the Gear Ghearr scheme, an initiative intended to bolster Gaelic-language filmmaking. The program lasted only three years, 1996-1998, and produced only seven short films, yet there had never before been such concentrated Gaelic-language filmmaking.

The scarcity of Gaelic-language films is an effect of the relative rarity of Gaelic speakers. The decline of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland occurred over several hundred years, but in recent decades it proves to be surprisingly resilient in several respects. As David Martin-Jones points out, around 60% of the population of the Western Isles speaks Gaelic, and in many places, particularly the Highlands and Islands, Gaelic is taught and spoken in many primary schools (2015, 25). Additionally, the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005 founded the Bord na Gaidhlig, “a body with several functions with respect of the promotion of Gaelic, both as a

culture and as a language of equal status to English in Scotland” (2015, 26). Gaelic remains a significant part of Scottish identity, especially in recent years since devolution.

Gaelic language and culture hearken to pre-British and even pre-Christian eras, when Gaelic was spoken by people living in much of the region now known as Scotland. Martin-Jones argues that the rise of Scotland as a nation, and especially the rise of the United Kingdom, are bound to the gradual decline of Gaelic. He cites the Statutes of Iona in 1609, which required that the eldest sons of clan chiefs receive their education in the Lowlands and in English, as one example of the ways Gaelic declined in Scotland (2015, 26). The goal of the Statutes, of course, was to facilitate better control over the Highlands and Islands by James VI (later King James I). The Highland Clearances following the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746 also devastated Gaelic, largely de-populating the Highlands and outlawing many aspects of clan culture. Gaelic was marginalized as the British project sought to make English the dominant (if not exclusive) language. For over two centuries, Gaelic was an endangered language.

However, since the 1980s a “renaissance” of Gaelic culture has taken place, and film plays a significant part along with television and radio (Martin-Jones, 2015, 26). The Gear Ghearr initiative began amidst other moments for Gaelic language and culture, among them the launch of Gaelic television in 1993 by the Comataidh Telebhisein Gaidhlig (Gaelic Television Committee), radio in 1996 with the Comataidh Craolaidh Gaidhlig (Gaelic Broadcasting Committee), and film in the mid-1990s with support from the Scottish Film Production Fund (later Scottish Screen, and now Creative Scotland) (2015, 26-27). The resurgence of Gaelic coincided with technological and political developments that brought about mass communications, increased public funding for cultural preservation, and renewed interest in cultural identities apart from “Britishness” leading up to, and after, devolution.

There is not a “Gaelic cinema,” or Gaelic film industry at present, but there are now enough Gaelic films, feature and short, to warrant significant conversation. The first Gaelic feature-length film was *Hero* (Barney Platts-Mills, 1982), and the first short screened in 1992, Douglas Mackinnon’s “Sealladh/The Vision,” starring Peter Mullan. Features *As An Eilean/From the Island* (Mike Alexander, 1995), and *Seachd: The Inaccessible Pinnacle* (Simon Miller, 2007) are some of the key entries in Gaelic-language cinema. In spite of the modest number of titles, it is clear that cinema has an role to play in the preservation, appreciation, and examination of Gaelic language and culture.

“An Iobairt” was Gerda Stevenson’s directorial debut. Stevenson, a Scottish actor, is perhaps best known for a supporting role in *Braveheart*. This film was an opportunity to direct that might have eluded her in the mainstream industry. Like Tartan Shorts and Prime Cuts, Gear Ghearr was intended to finance high production value short films, using the best possible talent. However, Gear Ghearr, had a more explicit cultural mission, as the films’ dialog were required to be a majority Gaelic-language. Given such a task, the preservation and exploration of Gaelic was at least equal to any commercial or industrial goals the films may achieve. Seven short films were made under the scheme, and of those films’ sixteen key creative roles (producer, director, writer), six were filled by women<sup>14</sup>, a far higher percentage than in Hollywood, London, or the Scottish film industry at present (Petrie, 2000, 229).

*Plot Summary:* The film opens on a shot of blue sky and clouds; the location is the Scottish countryside near the sea. A couple drive through the countryside, and the woman talks about how grateful she is for this outing. As they drive into the woods, apparently far from civilization, she sees a red car and becomes very upset. They arrive at their destination, unload tools, and begin to cut peat. As they work, the soundtrack is filled with chanting and voiceover in

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<sup>14</sup> These included four producers and two directors.

Gaelic. The film cuts to someone kneeling in the woods, but whether this is a flashback or parallel action is unclear. The man helps the woman cut peat as she works frantically. She states that she wants to struggle away at it, as she is clearly upset about something. The couple see a hooded figure nearby, and then it disappears. A bottle lays near their workspace, and they both drink from it. The kneeling figure in the woods lifts his hair off his neck, perhaps in preparation for execution. It begins to rain as the couple take shelter in the car. They drink the whisky and kiss.

When the rain stops, they see the hooded figure again, but it disappears once more. As they continue to dig in the peat, they find human remains. They see the hooded person in the distance. Some time later, the couple bring police to investigate the skeleton and it is determined that it is centuries old. The two talk with an archaeologist, who determines that the skeleton belonged to a human sacrifice from over 2,000 years ago. She explains that the person would have known he was going to be a sacrifice, and prepared himself for it. His sacrifice was meant to ensure the well-being of the community. In the final scene, a red car belonging to the woman's father is pulled out of a loch, and she speculates that he committed suicide so that his life insurance money would go to her. Through their deaths, both the ancient person and the woman's father attempted to take care of their loved ones, and the woman is able to come to terms with her father's death through this realization.

*Analysis:* Other than the Gaelic language, Gaelic films contain a number of identifiable themes and trends. David Martin-Jones identifies these as: a continuation of traditional oral culture; youthfulness of the projects (both stories that focus on children and young people, but also the young ages of the principal creative teams); distinctive rural landscape; and the passing of time experienced differently in the Gaidhealtachd (Gaeldom) than the whole of Scotland, the

UK, and the rest of the world (2015, 28-30). “An Iobairt” presents some of these characteristics, and others as well.

Storytelling and songs help preserve Gaelic history and culture, and centuries of oral culture found new expressions in film late in the twentieth-century and the early twenty-first. In *Seachd*, the narrative centers on a grandfather telling his grandson stories, with the grandson ultimately accepting his role as the one to carry on the tradition. In “An Iobairt,” archaeologist tells a story that helps the protagonists understand, and connect with, ancient traditions. When the female protagonist discovers that her father probably committed suicide to ensure that she would be taken care of, a link is made between ancient (human sacrifice) and modern (insurance policies) practices. Also, many Gaelic films show older generations giving, or passing something of great value to the younger generations. “An Iobairt” continues this motif, as the older generation provides for the younger, but also passes on the meaning of sacrifice.

The rural landscape of the Islands plays a role in “An Iobairt,” as it does in several other Gaelic films. In the opening scenes, the main character drives to the countryside and there she is able to learn a lesson and come to terms with her loss. Part of this return to the land involves physically touching and working with it, as the couple cuts peat. She states that she needs to work hard and get dirty, immersing herself in the earth. The first appearance of the mysterious hooded figure occurs as the characters physically and metaphorically return to the land of their heritage. These mysterious appearances lead the protagonist to understanding, which may not have occurred without a reunion with the land. As Martin-Jones observes, “An Iobairt” considers “the landscape as a repository of history, a location that is imbued with the memories of the Gaidhealtachd,” because the characters dig up a corpse with a lesson to teach (2015, 30).

Time functions differently in “An Iobairt” and other Gaelic films than in the “progressive teleology of modern history” (Martin Jones, 2015, 30). The protagonist’s father is connected to the ancient human sacrifice, and the appearance of a ghostly figure at the peat cutting site suggests that the people and the place of the Gaidhealtachd are connected across time. The hooded figure is, like all spectral entities, representative of the past intruding on the present, muddying the idea of a linear progression of history where the past is over and done. “An Iobairt” suggests ancient and modern people are essentially the same, and there is little separation between past and present. This attitude toward time is markedly different from the forward march of history, in which progress is inevitable and continuing at an exponential rate. This conception of time is expressed with some variations by a number of indigenous and pre-colonial (and post-colonial) cultures with oral traditions, stories, and histories. Gaelic film, then, is an essential piece of Scottish national cinema because it often expresses the long past’s impingement on the present, compressing both into a single image, or confusing the boundaries between past and present through narrative and cinematographic techniques. “An Iobairt” engages in both of these strategies in its abrupt parallel cutting to the sacrificial victim of ancient times and the scenes in the present with the hooded figure. The first “flashback” is not necessarily recognized as such, and the sacrifice scenes are edited as if they occur simultaneously with the present-day couple as they dig.

In general, short fiction films are a friendly venue for minority languages and cultures in a current era when various ethnic groups and regions assert their cultural distinction and difference. While there is not money or infrastructure for a consistent output of Gaelic feature films, Gear Ghearr demonstrated that short films play a role in cultural expression and



preservation. Indeed, it is a very positive development that a language once suppressed by the British government is now expressed in film, and short films led the way in that medium.

### Into a New Century

The period 1980-1997 transitioned Scottish cinema from its decades on the fringes of British and English-speaking filmmaking to the construction of an up-and-coming national cinema in its own right. This occurred in conjunction with a flourishing of Scottish arts of all kinds, and a greater sense of cultural and political distinctness from the UK than at any time, arguably, since the Jacobite uprisings. Several incisive short films dealt with the psychological problems of masculinity amidst de-industrialization, and some featured a re-visitation of pre-twentieth-century Scottish history and culture (as seen in “An Iobairt” and “Sealladh,” both Gaelic-language films). All varieties of short filmmaking increased in quality compared to mainstream, high budget productions, and this was aided by Scottish public funds reserved for filmmaking as well as the new importance of film schools. In the mid-to-late 1990s, critics and scholars spoke of a “New Scottish Cinema,” indicating that independent and mainstream feature filmmaking in Scotland made a splash at this time. However, most of those same critics ignored the short films of the time and preceding it, and there was a widespread impression that this moment appeared out of thin air.

The foundation for the New Scottish Cinema (and what is now considered Scottish Cinema) was laid during this period by Scottish short films. Makers of shorts and key contributors, like Peter Mullan, Robin MacPherson, and others, enriched and in some cases led the surge of feature-length films made in Scotland beginning in the mid-1990s. Many of the key concerns of the New Scottish Cinema, like disaffected youth, unemployment, de-industrialization,

crises of masculinity and identity, are found in short films preceding the features in that movement (*Trainspotting*, *Orphans*, *Ratcatcher*, etc.). This makes it apparent that the latter 1990s were not really a “new” Scottish cinema. Instead, the 1980s and 1990s were the continuation and expansion of some elements previously seen in Scottish short filmmaking, especially the concerns for contemporary problems and the enterprising nature of many of the short film societies and film festivals. Also, with the addition of public money and a higher profile for Scottish cinema generally, the conflict between the artistic and commercial appeared, yet this is a tension that exists in most circumstances where films are currently made. Film festivals, television, and the Internet make mainstream access appear more attainable, yet the short film form has historically been a site of boundary-pushing and expression often in resistance to mainstream film.

In the next chapter, the tensions regarding what kind of film industry a changing Scotland should have continue to escalate, and central to this is the art versus commerce debate. In the twenty-first century, most amateur filmmaking clubs reached their final demise, but Scotland finally got its own film school for the education and training of another generation of Scottish filmmakers. Scotland as a nation became more socially and politically independent than ever after devolution, yet its feature film industry did not grow as robustly as expected. Out of necessity, new, international filmmaking partnerships formed, making Scotland a more transnational, or global, cinema. Many argued that for a Scottish film industry to thrive, multi-national productions should become the norm, just as many who argue for an independent Scotland see the keys to its success in partnerships with its European neighbors. At the same time, ongoing questions of how to grow Scottish filmmaking, and what roles short films should play remain pertinent.

## **Chapter V: Scottish Short Filmmaking Today: 1998-2016**

### Devolution and Entrepreneurship

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, Scottish filmmakers continued to work under challenging circumstances and changing political, social, economic, and technological contexts. Scotland's political and social fabric was altered by devolution and advancing separation from the UK. Additionally, a culture of entrepreneurialism dominated Scottish filmmaking at all levels. This was caused by a shift from subsidy to investment attitudes by institutions and, perhaps, the culture at large. During this time, short films were used to raise the standing of Scottish filmmaking, as funding schemes aimed for awards, recognition, and feature-length deals for their filmmakers. Short filmmaking of all kinds in Scotland is currently practiced by three groups that overlap somewhat: students, independent filmmakers, and cinema club societies. This final chapter attempts to tell the story of today's short filmmaking contexts and some of its significant films and filmmakers. This story shows that Scottish short fiction filmmaking is as diverse as ever, yet many local and group-based practitioners continue to decline. This puts short filmmaking in a precarious position as public sources of finance become scarcer and more competitive, thus threatening both the number and variety of Scottish subjectivities on film.

The roots of the current circumstances for short filmmaking trace to three major political events that changed Scotland and its relationship to the UK forever: the 1997 referendum in favor of devolution, the September, 2014 independence vote, and the 2016 UK-wide vote to leave the European Union. To varying degrees, all three events separated Scotland from the UK, paving the way for what appears to be an imminently and completely independent Scotland. As mentioned above, events like the 1987 poll tax made many Scots feel as if they were ruled by an "alien government" (Devine, 604). The growing momentum for a devolution referendum, which,

combined with a Labour landslide in 1997, resulted in 74.3% of Scottish votes in favor of devolution and a new Scottish parliament with some “tax-varying” powers (Devine, 617). Devolution did not equal independence, though, as many vital matters were still left to Westminster, such as national defense. In subsequent elections, the vast majority of Scots consistently voted for Labour (who were less opposed to Scottish devolution, and later, independence), or the Scottish National Party (a left-center party focused almost exclusively on achieving an independent Scotland). The 2010 UK election that led to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government saw miniscule support in Scotland for the Tories, and a further sense of alienation from Westminster. By 2014, a national referendum on independence was put forth by the Scottish National Party, led by Alex Salmond. Had this referendum passed, it would have undone the Union of 1707 and created an independent Scotland for the first time in over 300 years. It failed, with Scots voting “No” by a margin of 55.3%-44.7% (BBC News). However, the question of independence increasingly seems more of a “when” than an “if” because of such strong and growing support. Many who voted “No” cited worries over pension funding and currency issues. In June, 2016, a UK-wide referendum on whether to remain a member of the European Union resulted in 52% of the voters electing to withdraw from the EU. Majorities of voters in all of the Scottish local council districts voted to remain, comprising 62% in favor of staying part of the EU (BBC News). This indicates Scotland’s political difference from the rest of the UK. The full consequences of the Brexit are yet to be determined as of this writing, but economic problems are expected, including decreases in academic and arts funding<sup>15</sup>. A new Scottish referendum for independence may arrive soon, but the details of a possible Scottish entrance into the EU, and other important points are not yet fleshed out.

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<sup>15</sup> The UK relies on the EU for 16% of its research funding (Cressey and Abbott).

Nonetheless, Scotland voted to remain a key partner of the international community, while the UK as a whole voted to go its own way.

As noted previously, Scotland's moves toward political independence paralleled its renewed cultural and artistic distinction. However, creating a national film culture and industry is fraught with perils. While indigenous feature production had never been so prolific post-*Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994), many films made after 1996 failed to make profits at the box office. Scotland-as-film location grew post-*Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) as well, but it has not grown so much as to fully sustain an industry within Scotland. Instead, most feature filmmaking relies on a complex combination of private investment, public funding sources, and international partnerships. This reliance on a kaleidoscope of funding sources is similar for other small countries, like Denmark and Norway, and indeed, Denmark is one of Scotland's primary feature film partners. Short films, while almost never profitable, rely most heavily on private investment and public funding.

Private investment in all kinds of filmmaking is notoriously fickle, as investors usually want guarantees or near-guarantees of profits. Even in Hollywood, a minority of films actually make money, and it is difficult to tell when a film will be a hit. The large film industries of the world can afford to cast a wide net, financing many films that ultimately make no money or lose money, as long as a few become monstrously profitable. In a small country like Scotland, the margin for error is very slim, and public funding and international partnerships mitigate the risk of private investment, but not to the extent that a stable industry can take hold.

Public funding sources in Scotland have long consisted of a shifting body of organizations and schemes. Bodies as varied as Films of Scotland, the Scottish Film Production Fund, Scottish Screen, the Glasgow Film Fund, and others provided funding for filmmaking in

Scotland, including a bit for short filmmaking. As Jonathan Murray points out, the 1990s were a time of expanded local support for filmmaking, both for runaway Hollywood productions and indigenous projects (2015, 4). These included institutions and initiatives like Scottish Screen Locations (designed to promote and aid the use of Scotland as a filmmaking location for big-budget films); Movie Makars (a screenwriting workshop); and the Glasgow Film Fund. Murray contends these local efforts were modeled after North American, independent filmmaking initiatives like the Sundance Institute (2015, 5). Indeed, he claims that many of the New Scottish Cinema's financing strategies, and even aesthetics mimicked the American Independent cinema of the 1980s and 1990s. By the 2000s, many local filmmaking institutions fragmented, changed, and international co-productions came to prominence (Murray, 2005, 14). To illustrate, Creative Scotland was established in 2010 as a catch-all organization for the funding of Scottish arts, replacing entities like Scottish Screen. As such, Creative Scotland does not necessarily place a special emphasis on filmmaking as Scottish Screen once did; instead, they support all forms of artistic production, from theater to painting to sculpture. For some filmmakers, the elimination of a body like Scottish Screen (which was devoted solely to Scottish filmmaking) in favor of a broader organization is disconcerting. At the same time, British sources of funding like the BFI and the BBC remain open to Scottish filmmakers. The ability to draw from both Scottish and British coffers might explain why, in the years leading up to the 2014 vote on independence, many Scottish filmmakers were relatively neutral in their stances regarding independence, both in the press and via the content of their films. If Scotland becomes independent, filmmakers' access to the BFI and the BBC is in doubt.

International partnerships became the third, key source of funding, but not as much for short films. Advance Party, a partnership between the Scottish production company, Sigma

Films, and the Danish, Zentropa, had some success. They produced *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006) and *Donkeys* (Morag McKinnon, 2006), with a third film to be directed by Mikkel Norgaard stuck in development. Short films also became a bit more international, as programs like the ENGAGE project attempted to “foster co-production between [film school] students in different countries” (Robin MacPherson, Video Interview). Starting in 2008, Scottish film school students were able to take part in ENGAGE’s “development-oriented program,” which focused most on script development and pre-production with international students (Robin MacPherson interview). As to the benefits of this program, Robin MacPherson states:

I think its main benefit was to kind of expose young filmmakers to European co-production, which is the basis of film production in Europe, really, now. And it gave them an introduction to that earlier in their careers than they would have otherwise had the opportunity to experience. They got to travel and meet and wrestle with all the challenges of working collaboratively across different cultures and languages in their final year at college. So, hopefully, it’s planted the seeds and some of the earlier participants have gone on now and they’re working professionally and internationally and hopefully that has provided them with a good grounding in European co-production. (Video Interview, 8 July 2016)

This program is admirable, but MacPherson is a bit too optimistic here. The program did not result in any actual productions of short films, but instead acquainted Scots with other young, European filmmakers. International cooperation is all well and good, but without actual money and infrastructure to make films, little beyond script development happens. Outside of official institutions and programs, some independent filmmakers also sought international partnerships via their own networking and marketing skills. As we will see later, key creative personnel involved with Lucy Brydon’s film “Babe” came from outside the UK.

According to Jonathan Murray, international co-productions during the 2000s were “characterized by artists’ exploration of a variegated range of possible national identities and cultures. More radically yet, a large number of contemporary features actively chose to depict

identities and cultures which, while encountered within a Scottish setting, refused to be confined or defined by a single set of territorial borders” (2015, 15). This diffusion of funding and identities forces us to reconsider when a Scottish film no longer Scottish. How borderless can Scottish cinema be before it no longer reflects anything culturally distinct? This questioning and expansion of national identities may indeed be productive, but this cosmopolitanism is mostly limited to feature films. Most Scottish short films remain distinctly local in terms of their funding sources (receiving support through Screen Academy Scotland if the filmmaker is a student, for example; or, self-funding by maxing out credit cards; or, applying for smaller and local grants such as Dewar Arts), locations, and subject matter. In theme and subject matter, emphases on local identities (such as Gaelic), gender roles, and contemporary Scottish life and issues are vital. Rather than lament that Scottish identity is limiting when it comes to filmmaking, I think it is important to emphasize the varieties of Scottish subjectivities, which are not limited much at all. But, most crucially, in spite of all the political, cultural, and economic changes that occurred over the last twenty-five years, it is the rise of an entrepreneurial culture in short filmmaking (and Scottish filmmaking, generally) that has come to dominate.

Where public arts funding is limited, the entrepreneurial skills of the filmmaker become vital. This has widespread consequences, as Robin MacPherson laments, “By succumbing to the economic doctrine of ‘Creative Industries’ discourse (Schlesinger 2007), Scotland’s filmmakers and policymakers have exercised a form of self-exclusion which removes social, cultural and political concerns from the arena of ‘legitimate’ film policy discussion. This is to the detriment not just of Scottish cinema, but of our national cultural life as a whole” (MacPherson, 2009, 223). A shift in the 1980s to 1990s from a discourse of “subsidy” to “investment” brought the independent filmmaker/entrepreneur to Scotland (MacPherson, 2009, 225). Again, this



discursive model closely resembles independent filmmaking culture in the U.S. Short filmmakers in present-day Scotland are also required to be entrepreneurs because significant arts funding is difficult to obtain and may become more difficult in the near future as a result of Brexit.

At the same time, this is nothing radically new for makers of short films. As we have seen, Margaret Tait was relentless in her attempts to find audiences for her films and secure funds, both public and private, for her filmmaking activities. Enrico Coccozza was an entrepreneur in the classical sense – a small businessperson who self-funded his films. These filmmakers and other short filmmakers can afford to take chances and make social and political statements in their work because of the short film's relative cheapness. Advocates for progressive cinema, like Robin MacPherson and Colin McArthur, strongly argue for investing in “creative industries” with a “larger set of cultural and social values” (MacPherson, 2009, 237). In the 1990s McArthur proposed a low-budget Third Cinema model based on the initiatives of post-colonial nations (32). The chief difficulty still lies in getting the films seen, as that requires advanced entrepreneurial skills by the filmmakers, who are usually their films' strongest advocates.

In sum, money for filmmaking is scarce in Scotland. An independent Scotland might possess even fewer sources of finance unless significant state subsidies shoulder the burden. This possibility seems unlikely at present, however, given the number of demands on the public coffers that a totally independent Scotland would generate. Compared to national healthcare and old age pensions, filmmaking ranks lower on the national priority. Tax breaks for traveling film and television production could partially fund domestic production (as it does now), but it is not yet possible to determine whether that will create enough revenue for a sustainable, national film industry.

For the time being, short films will remain an important part of Scottish national cinema. The reasons for this are the same reasons stated above: short films are usually cheaper, they produce local talent, and they tell local stories. It is likely that until (and for a while after) the economic outcomes of Brexit and (possibly) independence are settled, short films will again be required to carry fiction filmmaking in Scotland.

### Short Films as Part of the National Cinema Project

As an entrepreneurial/American independent-model came to define Scottish filmmaking in the 1990s (and beyond), there remained the problem of how to identify and grow talent, as well as raise the profile of Scottish filmmaking, generally. Scottish short films and short filmmakers functioned beautifully in both tasks, and indeed, there would not have been a New Scottish Cinema in the 1990s without short films. This is because schemes like Tartan Shorts produced several of the new directors associated with Scottish National Cinema of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and because many of the themes and issues explored in the short films carried over into the feature films. These included revisions of Scottish masculinity (especially the “hard man” in the wake of de-industrialization), and a sense of possibility combined with uncertainty in the wake of the 1997 devolution vote. Others (see Petrie, 2000) have written about how films like *Orphans* (Peter Mullan, 1998) and *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002) feature characters who are unmoored from their prior situations and must now move forward under drastically different circumstances. Without overstating the allegorical possibilities, it is fair to say that a devolved Scotland faced a situation in which its longtime role in the UK was different; Scots were more independent than ever before, and as a small nation, the Scottish people had to collectively answer the question “What do we do now?” Several

characters in the Scottish short films of the time ask the same question, and no easy answers arise. In addition to their artistic values, the short films of the late 1990s and 2000s unquestionably raised the profile of Scottish filmmakers within the UK and abroad. Directors like David Mackenzie, Morag McKinnon, Lynne Ramsay, and Peter Mullan all made shorts that traveled internationally and directly led to their feature careers.

The following short film, “Duck,” is a good example of a film made as part of the Tartan Shorts project to build a national cinema. It was ultimately screened on the BBC and at international festivals and raised the status of several of its key creative personnel. Director Kenny Glenaan went on to win a BAFTA Scotland for Best Feature Film with *Summer* (2008), and his films *Gas Attack* (2001) and *Yasmin* (2004) screened at international festivals and won prizes, such as the Coup de Coeur at the Mons International Festival of Love Films for *Yasmin*. “Duck” was his directing debut after a prominent career as an actor in the Glasgow theater scene, and he has also directed television films and series like *Being Human* (2008 television series), *Charlie* (2014 miniseries), and *DCI Banks* (2010 television series). Producer Robin MacPherson has been referenced several times in this project already, as his prolific career as a filmmaker, scholar, administrator, and educator make him one of the most significant figures in, and advocates for, Scottish cinema of the past two decades. Additionally, the film deals with a down-on-their-luck Glaswegian couple struggling with alcoholism and a lack of direction.

In July 2016, I had the opportunity to talk with MacPherson, about the film, its origins, and the significance of Tartan Shorts. A portion of that interview is after the film’s plot summary.

**“Duck”** directed by Kenny Glenaan

1998, 16:56 minutes, Color, Sound

Principal Production Credits

*Director:* Kenny Glenaan

*Writer:* Des Dillon

*Producer:* Robin MacPherson

*Director of Photography:* Grant Scott Cameron

*Production Design:* Irene Harris

*Editor:* David Gibson

*Sound:* Peter Brill

*Principal Cast:*

Peter Mullan as Mick

Fiona Bell as Carmen

Pamela Kelly as Woman in the park

*Plot Summary:* The film opens on Mick and Carmen having sex, but their tempers interrupt the act. They argue about Mick’s insecurities until Carmen angrily yells, “I love you and I’m never gonna leave you!” The couple’s verbal and physical violence indicate their dysfunction. The décor of their flat shows that this is a poor, or working class dwelling, and that both Mick and Carmen appear to be in the midst of hard times – financially, emotionally, and relationship-wise.

Carmen gets up; she looks for something in the kitchen. Mick pours whisky. This incites Carmen. Next we see the couple sitting on a park bench. A woman passes by, pushing a

screaming baby in a pram. Tension between Mick and Carmen grows as they amble toward a pond. Mick suddenly reaches into the pond and pulls out a duck. He secures it, still alive, and they take it home. When they arrive in their kitchen, Mick takes out a cleaver, ready to kill the bird. He can not do it. Instead, Carmen kills it. As she prepares it for dinner, she berates Mick. He feels emasculated by his inability to kill the duck, and she is insensitive to this. When the fowl is prepped for cooking, Carmen leaves Mick to finish the work of making dinner. She goes to a club. While Carmen drinks and dances, Mick cooks and burns the meal. He leaves the apartment to find Carmen.

When Mick arrives at the club, he sees her dancing with another man. He, in turn, dances with another woman, and each attempt to make the other jealous. Carmen is the first to lose her temper, and she physically attacks Mick. He tears her shirt. Their fight continues outside and into the nearby park. Carmen burns him with a cigarette, and Mick falls into the duck pond. For a moment, it appears that Mick might drown. Carmen panics, says she is sorry, and just at that moment he leaps out of the water. He was faking. She says he is “useless,” they continue to wrestle until both are wet and exhausted. She offers him a cigarette. They reconcile over the one cigarette that survived, and both sober up. Neither admits to being scared, but Mick says, “We can’t go on like this.” They are both alcoholics, struggling to get by, and the film ends on a series of close ups of the two in conversation. They are muddled, battered, and pathetic, but perhaps they realize the new direction their lives need to take.

*Production Information and Context; A Conversation with Robin MacPherson:*

ZF: How did “Duck” come about?

**RM: I was approached by Kenny Glenaan, the director, and he wanted somebody to produce the film. That’s the stage where we submitted an application to Scottish Screen, to**

**the Tartan Shorts scheme. I was working at the time at Edinburgh Film Workshop Trust and had produced my first short drama, a half hour film called “The Butterfly Man,” which was a really enjoyable experience. Kenny approached me with this project to adapt a short story by Des Dillon as a film and I agreed.**

ZF: I’m curious about that process of applying for funding with Tartan Shorts and those other schemes. Was that difficult? Did he [Kenny Glenaan] have that set up before you joined, or did you help him get the funding and everything?

**RM: Yeah, I helped. I think at the point he approached, I don’t think we had a script. I could be wrong about that, but it was quite early on in the process. It was an application process, a two-stage, three stage application process to Scottish Screen and BBC Scotland involving submitting a treatment, and going through the shot listing, an interview process, and then finally getting the commission.**

ZF: As I looked at some of the films that were commissioned by Tartan Shorts, it looks like a lot of the directors – a lot of the key creative talent – had already worked in the film and television industries, or had some pedigree. Is that what you found to be the case, as well?

**RM: Yeah, I mean, generally speaking, they’d made some sort of short film before like a Prime Cut or something similar. In many cases they’d worked in adjacent roles in film as an assistant director, editor-type roles. So, yeah, it generally was an assumption that people had some evidence of their ability.**

ZF: What were some of the roles you took on as producer for “Duck”?

**RM: I suppose, on a creative level, to be the second pair of eyes on script development which was between Des, the writer, and Kenny, and myself. So, we as a trio were involved in script development, and then all the practical, logistical stuff of budgeting and**

**scheduling and, as we got further into the process, crewing, and having discussions about who was going to crew the film, and all the many discussions about what was going to be feasible and possible for the available budget.**

ZF: How did Peter Mullan become involved with the film?

**RM: Peter was a friend or associate of Kenny's. Kenny's background was in theater, so he was very well connected amongst actors. He was able to approach Peter and get Peter to agree to play the lead part.**

ZF: What inspired you and Kenny to want to tell that kind of narrative?

**RM: Well, I think Kenny came from a sort of milieu, a working class, grassroots theater approach, which was fairly well-established in terms of the film community in Scotland. And one of the critiques, the famous critiques, is exactly this kind of concern with urban, working class masculinity to the exclusion of everything else. But it was a good story and it had a feel of authenticity which came partly from the writer's own experiences. He had fairly chaotic life experiences which he reflected in his novels and short stories, and Kenny was attracted to that and I could see the strength in the narrative.**

ZF: I see the film as open-ended. It's hopeful, but open-ended. Is that the way you see it as well? How do you read these characters by the end of the film after that strange day?

**RM: Yeah, I think there is a sense of hope and possibility there. That glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel of the chaotic life. So, yeah, I think it is hopeful.**

ZF: That duck was a hilarious prop. That really worked well.

**RM: Yeah, there's sort of a dark, comedic kind of undercurrent to it. which I think was the other thing about the story that it was about harsh lives in a harsh world, and it was told with a kind of comic twist.**

ZF: Is there anything else from that experience that you wanted to let me know about?

**RM: Well, I learned a great deal about Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) and the difficulties of shooting in water making that film. We also had an enormous difficulty with the language with BBC. They felt that swearing, the level of the swearing in it, was excessive, and at one point threatened maybe not to show the film at all.**

ZF: Oh really?

**RM: Yeah.**

ZF: That's interesting.

**RM: They did, eventually, but it was touch and go at one point.**

ZF: You shot on 35mm, right?

**RM: Super 16mm.**

ZF: Super 16mm, really? It looks like its 35mm, but I guess that's the advantage of Super 16mm.

**RM: The Super 16mm was blown up to 35mm for the theatrical print.**

ZF: What are some of the impacts that Tartan Shorts had on Scottish cinema?

**RM: Well, it was a very successful short film scheme. It ran for, how long did it run, ten years?**

ZF: At least. It went into the early 2000s, I believe.

**RM: So almost fifteen. And I think it got off to a great start because the very first year "Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life" won an Oscar, so it kind of had a lot of impact, and it raised the profile of Scottish filmmakers at festivals and showcases. It acted as a showcase for Scottish filmmaking talent. I think toward the end of that period it became safer and more televisual and it lost some of the edge that it had in the earlier years.**



*Analysis:* “Duck” was one of the three Tartan Shorts commissioned in the sixth year of the scheme. By 1998, Peter Capaldi, Peter Mullan, and Lynne Ramsay had already directed Tartan Shorts, much to the advancement of their careers. David Mackenzie in 1999 and Morag McKinnon in 2000 directed their Tartan Shorts and both went on to success with features.

As MacPherson mentions, the film deals with urban, working class masculinity – a theme that pops up in numerous Scottish features from 1995-2005, yet the film seems to be at least as much about a couple’s insecurities and aimlessness. The sense of possibility but a lack of conviction regarding what to do next unifies the film and, to an extent, that Scottish historical moment. This era was defined by the devolution vote and the uncertainty during the years immediately following, as Scots worked to form their own parliament and partially break up with Britain, to use Tom Nairn’s term.

“Duck” displays many of the short film’s signature qualities that Raskin and Felando discuss. The story time is a single day, a brief but contentious time in the lives of the unremarkable protagonists as their problems come to a head over the attempt to capture, kill, and cook a duck. The characters are in a liminal state – if not throughout the film, then definitely by the end – as their relationship reaches a crisis point. By the end of the film, Mick and Carmen realize that they “can’t go on like this;” they need to make positive changes even though it is unlikely either know exactly how to do that.

In spite of the chaos and dysfunction, there is clearly an opportunity for Mick and Carmen at the end of the film to create a better future. Like Scotland’s vote on devolution, possibilities are apparent, but there are no guarantees of success and much depends on Mick and Carmen (and the Scottish people) working together to overcome obstacles. Mick and Carmen are symbolically “cleansed” by their immersion in the pond, yet at the same time the water must

indeed be filthy. They may be washed and ready for a new start, but the dirt of their past certainly informs their experience. This dirty baptism leaves off with many obstacles for them to confront in the future; a choice has been made in favor of change, but the consequences are yet to be determined. While it is unlikely that the film was intended as an allegory for Scotland circa 1998, the film's emphases on a crisis of confidence, dysfunction, and ultimately a new resolution certainly echo national themes and events in the package of a small and personal narrative. The ability of a short film to be about the moment and place it was made, the creative freedom it allows, and its swift production and release times for maximum immediacy are some of the strongest qualities of short films in general, and of "Duck" in particular.

As MacPherson mentioned in the interview, crewing a film is essential to the completion of a project. This is also a major obstacle for many short filmmakers, and one of the ways to overcome is to enroll in a filmmaking educational program, like a film school. One of Scotland's chief weaknesses was a lack of its own film school, but that was remedied after some difficulty.

### A Scottish Film School

National film schools are often a crucial component of a nation's cinema culture. Film schools are also prolific producers of shorts, as undergraduate and graduate students learn how to make films. After World War II, film schools across the world provided a way in to various film industries, and, as Duncan Petrie puts it, "Film schools have had considerable impact on wider stylistic trends, production practices, national cinemas, and film-making movements" (2010, 31). For decades, only a limited number of Scots (like Bill Douglas) were able to attend the London Film School, the National Film and Television School, or another institution abroad. The need

for one, though, became obvious and grew throughout the 1990s as indigenous and traveling feature production increased, demanding more people trained in filmmaking.

In August 2005, the long wait for a Scottish film school was over. Screen Academy Scotland opened in Edinburgh as a partnership between Edinburgh Napier University and the Edinburgh College of Art. Both institutions previously offered some filmmaking classes, but no university degree in filmmaking was available until the Screen Academy. Other Screen Academies were opened in the UK, including Screen Academy Wales, Bournemouth Screen and Media Academy, and Screen Academy at the London College of Communication and the Ealing Institute of Media (Petrie, 2010, 32). These screen academies were the centerpiece of a new national strategy to train and educate filmmakers in the UK, combining the efforts of the UK Film Council and Skillset, which is the “sector skills council for film and television” (2010, 32). Screen Academy Scotland’s first director was the same Robin MacPherson mentioned above. As a Glasgow-born, BAFTA nominated producer, and former Development Executive for Scottish Screen, he later served as a board member of Creative Scotland when that organization was formed in 2010. As previously mentioned, MacPherson’s background consisted of filmmaking, scholarly work, and administrative experience. These qualities made him an apt choice for the new film school.

In the same interview, we discussed the beginnings of the Scottish Screen Academy:

**RM: It [Screen Academy Scotland] came about through, I call it a kind of a coincidence of aspiration and opportunity. The aspiration to establish a film school had been around at Edinburgh Napier for some time and we had an earlier incarnation of something called the Scottish Film School which ran for a couple of years, but ran into funding difficulties, so it really didn’t get established. In 2003-2004, the opportunity arose because of this initiative by Skillset, the UK sector skills council for creative media, to establish a number of screen academies and funding set aside for that. We were able to put together a bid with a combination of Edinburgh Napier and Edinburgh College of Art which secured the widespread support across the industry and the sector in Scotland. We got the support of**

**industry bodies, the producer's association, trade unions. Also, the other higher education institutions agreed that they weren't in a position to bid competitively with us so we had a clear run from Scotland to establish one of the initial seven screen academies.**

ZF: Was funding one of the challenges you faced initially, or did that happen over time?

**RM: The funding was relatively good, to begin with. The first couple of years there was quite a substantial amount of funding. And then it began to decline. It's declined quite considerably from that initial period, so the challenges have become stronger in terms of maintaining financial support for the postgraduate provision.** (Video Interview, 8 July 2016)

Screen Academy Scotland was thus a public/private establishment from its start. Public, in that it was housed in and under the auspices of institutions of higher learning; private, in that it was also supported by various aspects of the film and television industry in Scotland and the UK. This support reflects that one of its primary goals was to train students to enter the creative industries. MacPherson's testimony shows that the tension between commerce and art when it comes to short filmmaking was well underway by the time of the formation of the Screen Academy Scotland. One of its clear purposes was to train students for entry into the film and television industries, yet as a public educational institution it was subject to increasing austerity as the economics of funding education changed throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s. The Screen Academy's decline in funding reflects the devaluation of arts education and training, while at the same time maintaining an expectation that it will be a boon to the national entertainment industry. Note that guaranteed provision for the creation of short films as a part of national culture and art was and is not a part of the film school's makeup. Therein lies the danger of enjoining private industry with public education; when the economy turns, austere policies harm public education. Private industry also demands financial returns on investment, little to no regard for culture and art.

Over its first ten years, Screen Academy Scotland faced two significant challenges. The first was an ideological dilemma: what should young filmmakers learn and for what purposes? This is a problem that faces all film schools, but especially so for a nation like Scotland which has attempted to create a sustainable, indigenous industry without consistent success. The second challenge was the practical problem of decreased public funding, as MacPherson mentioned above. After the financial crisis and Great Recession that began in 2007-2008, many Western governments reacted with policies of austerity. These included cuts to education, and Screen Academy Scotland was not spared.

After some time, and perhaps inspired by crises of funding due to the Great Recession, critiques of the screen academy model arose. In 2010, Duncan Petrie criticized the screen academies as creating “an education environment in which any serious intellectual dimension in the instruction of film and media practitioners has been eclipsed by the vigorous promotion of a rather reductive concept of skills training” (2010, 33). Petrie further argues that in contrast to historical examples, like the Soviet film school established in 1919, Italy’s in 1935, France’s in 1943, and others in Eastern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, the UK screen academies care too little for cultural value. They, like many other film schools in the U.S., for instance, suffer from “creeping anti-intellectualism” (2010, 42). The implications of this are succinctly put: “Not only does it erode a pluralistic and challenging film-making culture, it also suggests that if the serious study of cinema has little or nothing to offer those who aspire to make films, then our own legitimacy may be challenged by policy-makers” (2010, 43). For Petrie, an industry-based approach to filmmaking education threatens not only film culture, but also the discipline of film studies. By this, we may assume he means that if film is seen as only a commercial product to be bought and sold, rather than also as a form of expression and culture, the term “film studies”

makes no more sense than “life insurance studies.” With that understanding of film, public funding would make no sense. And yet, we know that the short film is a mode of expression deeply personal, connected to the local, and because of its brief production time, it is a good reflection of the historical moment of its making.

The source of the tension between commerce and art in film school education comes from a relative lack of arts funding in the UK combined with reduced spending on education. Unlike Petrie’s examples above – the Soviet, French, and Italian film schools established in the first half of the twentieth-century – the UK’s filmmaking culture is far closer to the US’s in the way it positions commerce as the primary objective. This is likely a symptom of the US-domination of the English-speaking filmmaking world, which offered the UK an opportunity to take part or operate as a satellite Hollywood, but it also lowered the priority for public spending on film. In many ways, Scotland has a very difficult task. Its domestic market it is too small for an unsubsidized commercial film industry; funding for national film education is reduced while also aiming grads at the industry where competition for jobs is fierce; and the overall filmmaking culture is based on an entrepreneurship-model seen in the United States, but also heavily reliant on European co-productions.

In the face of all these obstacles, the independent filmmaker in Scotland faces a Herculean labor. Short films remain the most feasible kind of filmmaking, as well as the source of most new filmmaking talent and Scottish subject matter in terms of settings, contemporary themes, and so on. In addition to film school students who produce short films as calling cards for industry employment, two other kinds of short filmmaking continue in Scotland.

Surprisingly, a few amateur filmmaking clubs carry on their community-based model in spite of

seeming obsolescence, and the Scottish independent filmmaker continues to adapt and evolve, producing shorts for many purposes but nearly always with difficulty.

### Scottish Amateur Filmmaking Clubs in the Twenty-First Century

As critics hailed the coming of a New Scottish Cinema and a new Scottish film school, older traditions of Scottish filmmaking declined. In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, amateur filmmaking clubs faced several challenges. The first was the technological contest between traditional, celluloid filmmaking and the advent of video and VHS. Some groups were bitterly divided over this, and both sides had legitimate points. For example, the image quality of video tape was inferior to celluloid, but tape was much cheaper. Editing with video at that time required the use of two VCRs in a tape-to-tape process that was more cumbersome than the physical cutting and pasting of celluloid film. However, if mistakes were made, it was more cost effective to use a new video tape than to order a new print of the film from the lab. Philosophically, advocates for film argued (and still argue, to a degree) that celluloid is more “cinematic” than video or any other format, while those who adopted video accused their colleagues of technophobia. Some filmmaking clubs were literally split in two over this issue, while others resolved their differences in other ways. The Edinburgh Cine and Video Society added the “Video” to the club name and held two different meetings, one on Thursdays for celluloid users and one on Fridays for video users (Speirs, 7). Many other groups eventually chose to accept all moving image work, regardless of format. As the 1990s became the 2000s, celluloid was almost completely abandoned by the filmmaking clubs of Scotland, as the groups turned to digital video and computer-based non-linear editing (requiring no splicing of film strips or endlessly erasing and re-copying videocassettes). Cameras and computers for editing and

effects became cheaper, but amateur filmmaking clubs dwindled. It seems strange that as the tools for filmmaking became more accessible to more people, amateur filmmaking clubs struggled (and continue to struggle) to exist.

The Dalziel Cine Club faced its demise in conjunction with the general decline of amateur filmmaking clubs in Scotland during the early 2000s. Brian Saberton writes in his historical overview of the club that by the 2003-2004 season membership was down to 15. In 2005-2006, the club entered their last submission to the Strathclyde Film Event (one of the major amateur film festivals and competitions in Scotland) a film entitled “The Room” (18). By November, 2006, a note from President Bill Farquharson pointed out that the club had “insufficient collateral to complete another year. Only 8 members had joined the club and expenditure was exceeding income by £200” (Saberton, 19). On March 4, 2008, the few remaining members of the club decided that it was impossible for the group to continue. Saberton writes of the 2007-2008 season, “The Treasurer resigned from the club and no new members were recruited in spite of advertising in the local libraries and newspapers and the fact that the syllabus was aimed firmly at beginners. Some meetings were poorly attended, with the lowest number being 3” (19). Thus ended the nearly 48-year run of the Dalziel Cine Club. Many of the club’s short films and papers were turned over to the Scottish Screen Archive at that time.

A select few filmmaking clubs survived the 1990s and 2000s, but they also suffered declines in membership and interest. The Edinburgh Cine and Video Society endures to this day, in spite of considerable challenges. Many of the difficulties facing filmmaking clubs are internal in nature. In the August, 2005 journal of the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society, *Cine Chat*, John Adair writes that

The club must grow not only if it is to thrive but more importantly in order to survive. To do this, you [ECVS members] say that more group/club films should be made. This



means greater communication and cooperation. We must rely on each other more. Cast aside inhibitions and personal likes and dislikes. Take the plunge and try something new and unfamiliar. Close reliance and friendship will come through shared interest and responsibility” (9).

This plea for greater community and cooperation is relevant to many social clubs, but especially so for filmmaking clubs because filmmaking is a collaborative art. Even many of the simplest amateur films require a few people to work together. The fact that many cine clubs are defunct might indicate a broader change in the culture regarding a sense of community and togetherness, thus reducing the need or desire for a club that requires a great deal of collaboration.

In addition to a lessened sense of community, filmmaking clubs have identified and attempted to counter other, practical difficulties. In 2012, the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society commissioned a strategy group to spot problems and come up with possible solutions. For instance, the group notes that “many people, in the 25-55, are too busy with family and business commitments to undertake other activities,” and this could be one reason why the age of the members continues to increase with few members in the 25-55 demographic (Emm, 4). The proposed strategies at the time involved creating more daytime meetings to accommodate older members, using social media to attract younger members, and developing a program that includes more competitions open to all amateur filmmakers in Edinburgh and the Lothians in order to attract non-member filmmakers to the group.

The Edinburgh Cine and Video Society faces numerous practical concerns: rising expenses for facilities and equipment, aging and declining membership, difficulties retaining members long-term, and more. The group also confronts an ongoing existential crisis regarding the role of filmmaking clubs, more generally. In the January 2015 *Cine Chat*, group president Stewart Emm raises a number of these concerns, and is worth quoting at length:

Video is everywhere. Access to production equipment is no longer a barrier to making video. Mobile phones can produce high quality still images and video footage that seriously rivals many consumer camcorders. The internet facilitates distribution, and the World Wide Web provides a global audience. In this grand scheme of things, where does the ECVS belong? How do we interact with it? True we have our web site and videos on YouTube. However, the original objectives of the ECVS to 'provide amateur moviemakers the facility to study, promote and encourage interest in all aspects of the visual arts concerned with and expressed through the medium of moviemaking', seem now to have been overtaken by events. The term amateur is definitely out of fashion, 'Indy' [sic] or 'Independent moviemaker', is preferred today...Using Google I come across many Internet based moviemaking individuals and groups in and around Edinburgh. However, most are wanting to use crowdfunding to finance their next production and using the Internet to recruit crew and cast for their next movie making venture. ECVS seems invisible to this sizeable and indigenous moviemaking/filmmaking population within the Edinburgh area. This presents an opportunity for the ECVS to connect with them and, find out what we need to do as a club, to explore common requirements which, hopefully, should result in a growth of our membership (3).

Emm's musings raise a number of points. First, advances in filmmaking technology and decreases in their costs undercut some of the mission of amateur filmmaking clubs. These clubs are not needed to provide access to, and training on, filmmaking equipment, which was a major part of their mission in past decades. Second, a growing entrepreneurial spirit combined with a decreased sense of community render the old cine clubs invisible to many of today's filmmakers. Kickstarter, craigslist, Ebay, Facebook, and other web sites and digital tools supposedly empower short filmmakers to fund their films, hire their crews, and exhibit and market themselves and their films. Joining a society, paying dues, and attending meetings seem practically inefficient.

On the other hand, many young, filmmaking Scots might be denying themselves a useful resource. The members of filmmaking clubs can provide helping hands, which are usually in short supply on a low budget short film. Filmmaking club members may own cameras and equipment that younger filmmakers could only hope to rent. Some groups, like the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society, also collectively possess bluescreens and other filmmaking resources

that could be useful to the younger, less equipped filmmakers. Give-and-take of tips, experiences, and ideas between younger and older filmmakers could enrich the films of both, and bolster a sense of community around filmmaking necessary for collaborative art. Scotland suffers because of its distance from the London-center of media and entertainment, and it needs all hands in order to create its own film culture.

**“The Quiet Man”** directed by Jim Closs of the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society

2013, 3:06 minutes, Color, Sound, Digital Video

Principal Production Credits

*Director:* Jim Closs

*Script Writer:* Alan Brown

*Producer:* Alan Brown

*Cameras:* Jim Closs, Peter Dick

*Props:* Bob Bell, Vic Young

*Principal Cast:*

Stewart Emm as Quiet Man

Alan Brown as Noisy Neighbor

*Production Information and Context:* “The Quiet Man” was the fruit of an intraclub challenge to make a film in one day. A large portion of the shooting occurred in the Edinburgh Cine and Video Society clubroom, which is equipped with a bluescreen. Another room served as the Quiet Man’s flat and the exteriors were the nearby streets of Edinburgh. The crew consisted of members of ECVS. The whole production took place on October 24, 2013, and it is a testament to the resourcefulness of the ECVS for a number of reasons.

In spite of declining membership and the continued invisibility of amateur clubs to the mainstream filmmaking press and community, ECVS shows with this film that it has much to offer the aspiring filmmaker. The film was shot on a high-end prosumer digital video camcorder and edited digitally on equipment and software used by many professionals (ECVS Bell and Speirs). The club also owns a screening room, bluescreen room, and other equipment to aid filmmaking. Most importantly, ECVS has approximately 10-15 active members with filmmaking experience and enthusiasm. According to their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary video, the equipment and resources of the club rivals that of most independent filmmakers and even that of some smaller university film production programs. Though the film was made in a single day, viewers will notice a fairly impressive level of special effects (which add to the comic effect of the film). The film's concept is simple, but its execution is very creative.

*Plot Summary:* The elderly Quiet Man walks down a residential street, carrying a newspaper. He walks up to his flat and enters. Inside, he sits at a small table and crosses off a date on the calendar, eats a sandwich, and reads the newspaper. He hears loud pounding coming from the flat above him. The Quiet Man imagines that the Noisy Neighbor upstairs is whacking the floor with a sledgehammer. The Quiet Man becomes exasperated and walks up the outside stairs to knock on his neighbor's door. The Noisy Neighbor shows him that he was only using a normal-sized hammer. The Quiet Man grumbles.

The next day, the same actions are repeated; the Quiet Man reads the newspaper, eats a sandwich, and crosses a date off the calendar. This time the noise sounds like quacking ducks. The Quiet Man imagines that the Noisy Neighbor houses several ducks in his apartment. When he confronts the Noisy Neighbor a second time, the neighbor shows him that it was only a small wooden duck call. The Quiet Man retreats back to his flat, even more annoyed than before. The

third day, the Quiet Man hears popping and exploding; he imagines fireworks upstairs. During the confrontation, the Noisy Neighbor shows the Quiet Man that he was only popping popcorn, and offers him some. The Quiet Man grabs a handful of popcorn and storms back to his flat.

On the third and final day, the Quiet Man looks for a new apartment in the newspaper classifieds. As he leaves, presumably to check out a new place to live, he runs into the Noisy Neighbor on the street. They get in each other's way, and the Quiet Man grumbles some more. The camera follows the Noisy Neighbor upstairs to his apartment, where it is revealed that he is indeed housing ducks, lighting fireworks, and pounding the walls with a sledgehammer all at the same time.

*Analysis:* At first, it does not seem like this film tackles social issues as other Scottish short films do; however, it does so metaphorically. As the "Yes" and "Better Together" campaigns gained steam throughout 2013 and 2014, the question of Scotland's relationship to the UK came to dominate the news and national conversation. In this film, the central tension is between neighbors who can not get along, and one neighbor is skilled at deceiving the other. Additionally, this film provides a good example of local filmmaking culture that survives in spite of a lack of visibility and recognition.

It is fair to read a metaphor of the tensions between Scotland and England in the narrative of "The Quiet Man." The persistently disruptive upstairs neighbor selfishly makes a lot of noise and nearly destroys both living spaces. The downstairs neighbor repeatedly confronts him, but each time the Noisy Neighbor provides a plausible, benign, and false excuse for the noise. The Noisy Neighbor's attempts to justify his inconsiderate behavior, combined with the occasional gesture of good will (the offering of popcorn) seem to echo London's attempts at mollifying promises but no substantive action. For instance, before the independence vote campaign, Prime

Minister David Cameron claimed that Scotland's EU membership would be jeopardized if Scots voted "Yes." Now it is clear that the only way for Scotland to be a member of the EU is to become an independent country! Another example is the claim made by the "Better Together" campaign that Scotland would not be able to use the British pound as currency. To the contrary, Sir Mervyn King, former Bank of England Governor stated in 2016 that no change of currency would have been necessary. King said, "there was no need for an independent currency, that wouldn't have posed any threat or difficulty for an independent Scotland" (Peterkin). The Quiet Man ultimately realizes that the best action is to go his own way, while the Noisy Neighbor is left with the mess he has made.

Amazingly, even in 2013, with numerous film festivals, television, a national film school, and something like a national feature film industry, the amateur film club carries on. While many of the clubs in smaller cities and towns went extinct years ago, a few in the larger cities, like Edinburgh, remain, if tenuously so. They continue to exist because of their connection to the local and the sense of community they engender. In contrast to its theme, "The Quiet Man" required a collective effort by a handful of people dedicated to the filmmaking group. Though the technologies have changed and advanced, the amateur club's reliance on small, enthusiastic crews and its members are its most defining features. The humor of the film's ridiculous domestic scenario is aided by a sense of fun and delight in making the film by the small group. Led by Alan Brown, who wrote, produced, and co-starred, the group of six involved in making this film shared and executed a vision. While the performances are amateurish and the effects are somewhat laughable, the film is tightly written with a precise structure and a payoff at the end. These qualities indicate that the filmmakers are aware of their limitations, but embrace them in order to entertain themselves and their audience.

This kind of short film has severe problems when it comes to exhibition because it has no film school to promote it or budget for many festival entries. “The Quiet Man” is available on YouTube, but outside of club screenings and contests it had no festival presence. YouTube itself is a mixed blessing because, as mentioned, access may be easy, but marketing drives viewers to films, and amateur clubs are notoriously poor at marketing themselves, let alone their films. In this way, though, perhaps “The Quiet Man” provides a kind of pure filmmaking free of commercial concerns, marketing strategies, and ties to any kind of outside financing or obligation. The filmmakers, who seem to be average Scots with few or no ties to show business of any kind, make films because they love it. The results are some of the most purely “Scottish” of all Scottish cinema. They are made more for a local audience, but if a wider viewership seeks them out, they are rewarding and reveal a lot about a locality’s filmmaking culture and practice. Additionally, as this film shows, short films made under these conditions can comment upon big, national questions and issues of their day, just as “The Quiet Man” does so by using metaphor as a chief strategy.

#### Entrepreneurial Filmmakers and Short Films Today in Scotland

The final group of short filmmakers in Scotland today are independent, entrepreneurial filmmakers. They are non- or quasi-professionals, currently not in film school, though they may be alums. They are also usually not employed by the mainstream film industry or, if they are employed at all, it is at the fringes or below-the-line positions. Because competition for grants and any kind of funding is intense, these filmmakers beg, borrow, and steal their way toward completed projects. Credit card debt, self-marketing, and shoestring productions are the norm. While many of these filmmakers would like to make a feature film, shorts are by far more

feasible for inexperienced and low-reputation directors. This means that festival screenings, awards, local press, and savvy marketing are just as essential for these filmmakers as a good script and a good cast. Many use their short films as portfolio-builders as they attempt to demonstrate their storytelling abilities in the hope of securing grants or funding from Creative Scotland or the BBC.

This kind of short filmmaking is perhaps the most difficult to accomplish in Scotland today. Without financing from a scheme like Prime Cuts or Tartan Shorts; without a film school's equipment and fellow students; and even without a hobbyists' attitude and small community of support in a local film club, these filmmakers rely on their determination and contacts. As a result, many independent short films do feature local talent and locations, yet they may reach further out if they have the network to do so.

In spite of many challenges, independent Scottish filmmakers produce remarkable short films with surprisingly high production values and pointed perspectives. Many short film schemes and funding sources ended by the mid and late-2000s, so student and independent filmmakers now create the bulk of the short films that, in turn, make up the bulk of Scottish national cinema. Each filmmaker's experiences vary significantly depending on personal resources, talent, and other factors, so broad generalizations are difficult to make. Fortunately, several Scottish independent filmmakers are accessible and eager to talk about their work and filmmaking more generally, so perhaps it is best if they speak for themselves whenever possible.

To that end, I made contact with Edinburgh-native artist and filmmaker, Lucy Brydon, who currently resides in London. We spoke about short filmmaking and her experiences at length. Her 2013 short film, "Babe," is discussed in the following section, and it is an example of



a recent, independent Scottish short film made by a woman filmmaker exploring issues like sexual assault, patriarchy, and working class experience in Scotland circa 2013.

A Conversation with Lucy Brydon, Independent Filmmaker

ZF: How did you become a filmmaker?

**LB: I studied creative writing as an undergrad and I took a film studies class during my degree. That was step one; it opened my eyes to filmmaking. I moved to Shanghai when I was twenty-one and started making short films with friends before moving into working at production houses and scriptwriting professionally. It took me a while to get to the confidence to direct but scriptwriting is a half-finished art and I got frustrated just doing that.**

ZF: How does filmmaking fit into your overall work as an artist?

**LB: I balance between mainly writing fiction and working on films. I occasionally do visual/performance art work but not so much these days. I find that developing a film and writing a book are almost equal opposites. Film is storytelling by committee - things take years to get made because there is so much money involved and there are a lot of people giving you feedback/wanting to be head. With fiction, you just do it by yourself and it's completely up to you, which can be both exhilarating but also lonely. I find doing both balances the other craft's negative aspects out. Doing one or the other, I think I'd go crazy. That probably sounds crazy anyway!**

ZF: How did your time in New York and China impact your filmmaking and other creative work?

**LB: China gave me the freedom to explore creatively because I was able to live cheaply and**

survive as a creative person which is increasingly hard to do in the Western world. That was a crucial time because I met so many interesting people but was also very inspired by my experience. I lived in Berlin briefly and it was similar there. Both taught me a lot of resilience and judgement. New York and my time at Columbia was great, because it was with loads of really brilliant people and I learned a lot in a very short space of time. I was sad when I had to stop studying because I couldn't afford it. However, it kind of worked out better in the long run in that I recently got my first feature commissioned by the BBC, BFI and Film London and I don't have a shed load of student debt. Not that I wouldn't have liked to have finished the course, but not finishing also made me much more tenacious about sticking with it. It also made me realize that you don't need a degree to do anything.

ZF: In what ways are short films important for you as a filmmaker and an artist?

LB: I think they've been crucial to understanding what my style is. Most of short film making is trying things out and seeing what sticks. I don't want to make things that are the same all the time - of course not - but you can only know your sensibility by trying things out (and sometimes hating the results!). I think knowing what you hate is almost more important than knowing what you like. And understanding why.

ZF: What do you like and/or dislike about making short films?

LB: There's not much afterlife for shorts beyond trying to get them into festivals, although this has improved slightly in recent years with more opportunities. In some ways, making a short can be almost as much effort as making a low budget feature, but the potential career impact of making a breakthrough first feature is obviously a lot more significant for filmmakers than shorts. That said, even though I will be making this feature soon I

wouldn't rule out making shorts again. They can be wonderful expressions of smaller ideas - Lynne Ramsay's "Swimmer" (2012)<sup>16</sup> is a strong example of that.

ZF: Even though we are in an era when you can put something on YouTube or various online entities that you can use to get your film seen, it's still very difficult to actually get your short films seen aside from festivals... if you can get into festivals. It seems to me that you have to have some kind of marketing apparatus just to get people to that YouTube channel or whatever, unless it goes viral somehow.

LB: Yeah, true. With "Babe," I did actually have a distribution agreement with somebody, but he never really did anything about it. And then I got the rights back. It's just really hard to get much afterlife with short films. I think the main purposes of shorts tend to be sort of as calling cards or exercises in a certain sense to sort of develop your sensibility. But that's not to say that they, as you know, I said as well I think there's some really fantastic short films out there that I really love. Like Lynne Ramsay's short films are brilliant, but I know it's such a monumental task making a film and nobody really realizes it. Then filmmakers try to get it in to Sundance and everyone tries to get into South By Southwest and Cannes, and they all pay the fifty bucks a time [for entry fees] and it costs hundreds of dollars to submit to these things. The chances of you actually getting picked are so slim...I don't know. Why do we do it, really? It's also the longevity of the film as a journey because it doesn't stop because you've finished the cut and colored it... It goes on for years after. It's in a much bigger sense for features, but I think shorts give you a small preparation for that in terms of things you have to take care of after

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<sup>16</sup> "Swimmer" was commissioned for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London by BBC Films, Film4 and the London Organisation Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

ZF: Most filmmakers struggle to fund their projects. Do you find that you have to be an entrepreneur/businessperson as well as an artist? If so, how?

**LB: Definitely. I think most of my artist friends know tons of weird and wonderful ways to make a buck - because you have to be that resilient and income is not always reliable – in fact, hardly ever. I think capitalizing on opportunities is an entrepreneurial skill that definitely overlaps with artists. You've got to be savvy! Look at someone like Damien Hirst. He's a businessman! And obviously a good one. I'm not good at selling myself at all, but have had to learn not to be reticent about my talents because there will always be bigger, louder voices in an already-crowded room, even if those with them aren't particularly talented. It sucks that sometimes shy people can struggle with that aspect of filmmaking, and I have probably suffered a little bit because of that. However, you have to go out there and tell people what you are doing. It's also just part of the culture we are in, for better or worse.**

ZF: What challenges do you face as a woman filmmaker? As a Scottish filmmaker?

**LB: I think people in the film industry are much less likely to take a chance on a female filmmaker, the same reason in many other industries. Speaking generally, women tend not to be so good at self-aggrandisement as men. I've seen this first hand. When I was at film school, we were all supposed to pitch into each others' projects. I always got asked to do costume and make-up. While this was a compliment, I suppose, it was frustrating that I would never get asked to help with camera and lighting etc. A lot of women on my course felt the same. It made me less confident in my technical abilities. However, I am hoping that times will change. I really think they should introduce quotas, or positive discrimination with regards to ethnicity and gender in film. It's beyond a joke now - it's the**

21st century and the statistics on women in any technical capacities, as well as direction and writing, in film are shocking. We need to do something about it. As a Scottish filmmaker, I think people have quite a lot of respect for Scotland as a small country that has contributed quite a lot to the film industry and across creative cultures. I think this has actually been helpful to me in many ways, and I haven't seen any negative impact from it. In London, where I now live, there are a lot of people clamouring for a small pot of funds. I think being Scottish helps you stand out, but there is a particular knack that the Scottish have for storytelling that sees many of them succeed.

ZF: Why do you think the Scots have a knack for storytelling?

LB: I don't know... It's quite strange but I think there's a sort of humor and in the Scottish psyche there co-exists humor and darkness in equal measure. And, I think the English, in my experience, they're not as uneven. They're generally a bit cooler temperamentally. I feel like it's this weird sort of blend, that sort of slightly, I would say an almost Gothic kind of sensibility that is very particular to Scottish storytelling. There's this really great fiction writer called Laura Hird, I don't know if you've heard of her, but she's Scottish, and she's sort of similar to what I've been talking about. She writes short stories, but they're always very weird and dark. It's hard to decipher. Yeah, I think we're just a bit different. And I think that can sometimes help. I think it's helpful to have something that distinguishes you a bit more from all these English people. Not that I don't like the English. Well, they did make us Brexit, so... I haven't really forgiven them for that, yet.

ZF: Do you plan to shoot other short films (or features for that matter) in Scotland?

LB: Yes! I will definitely shoot there in the future. I would consider setting my second feature there. My first feature will be set in southeast England because of budget

**constraints. I am based in London and so are most of the crew. It's a bit of a shame that I can't manage to shoot up there but I am excited at the prospect of shooting in Edinburgh or Glasgow in the future. Creative Scotland does a lot to support its own, so I think making my second feature there I would probably get a lot of help from them. As long as the first one is good!**

**“Babe”** directed by Lucy Brydon

2013, 12:53 minutes, Color, Sound, RED 4K

Principal Production Credits

*Director:* Lucy Brydon

*Writer:* Lucy Brydon

*Producers:* Claudia Liz Litzka, Demond Robertson, Lucy Brydon

*Cinematographer:* Monika Lenczewska

*Film Editor:* Noemi Katharina Preiswerk

*Production Designer:* Karla Von Denkoff

*Principal Cast:*

Kate McLaughlin as Babe

Donald Morrison as Dad

Scott Stewart as Has

Dominic Wolf as Zola

Ali McLeod as Boy

Sean Heron as Boxing Teacher

Jenni Duffy as Michelle

Tara Fitzpatrick as Chrissie

*Plot Summary:* The film opens on a full shot of Babe, a 13-year old girl, spinning on a merry-go-round in a park. Other kids play in the park, but she is alone. Later, Babe bounces a ball against the wall of a building. Her Dad exits their flat, and he carries a hard hat. He is leaving for an extended time, perhaps for work in construction or the oil industry. We meet Babe's older, teenage brother, Has, for the first time, as well. Dad says to Babe and Has, "See you soon. Be good." He follows that up by telling Has, "No parties." Babe ambles to a local boxing gym and watches the trainer and a woman in the midst of a self-defense/boxing lesson. No one notices her, and she imitates the punches and combinations by shadowboxing.

Later, when Babe goes home, Has has friends over and they are drinking. Babe enters the kitchen looking for food. Has asks her to leave. She says, "I want some chips." He gives her some money and she leaves. It is night, and Babe sits alone on a park bench eating her chips. When she comes home, everyone is gone. She turns out the light and goes to bed. The next morning an alarm wakes her up. Has's friend, Zola, enters the flat. Babe says she does not know where Has is. Zola takes an interest in Babe and asks her about her age. At that moment, Has comes home and tells Zola he is going to go on a date later that night and he wants Zola to watch Babe. Zola agrees. Later that day, Babe goes back to the gym and steals a heavy bag. No one notices her drag the large piece of equipment out of the gym and all the way home. She sets it up in her room and punches it, as if in training for a fight.

Some time later, Babe takes a bath and Has says through the door that he is leaving for his date. Babe is laying on the couch in her bathrobe when Zola arrives to babysit. He sits next to her and offers her a joint. She refuses. He gives her a small kiss. Babe is thoroughly creeped out, and she says she's going to bed. In her room, she punches the heavy bag. Zola enters, uninvited.

He says “You like to fight?” Babe, sensing danger, tries to run out of her room but Zola grabs her. He tells her to punch him. After antagonizing her for a bit while her punches land without effect, Zola throws Babe onto the bed and rapes her offscreen. Outside the flat, Has kisses his date goodnight. When Has makes his way inside, he hears the commotion from Babe’s room and immediately confronts Zola. Has says to Zola, “You’re sick!” Zola tells him to get out of the way, then pushes Has into the wall, calling him “a fucking soft twat.” Zola leaves and Has sinks to the floor. The next morning, the alarm goes off and we see Babe wearing her bathrobe and laying on the bed in the fetal position. Later that day, she drags the heavy bag back to the gym. This time, she is noticeably beaten up, with bruises on her face. The boxing instructor incredulously watches her return the bag.

*Production Information and Analysis Excerpted from an Interview with Lucy Brydon:*

ZF: Where did you get the idea/inspiration for “Babe”?

**LB: Sexual violence has affected several people in my life and I wanted to make something that reflected that.**

ZF: How did you obtain funding for the film?

**LB: I got a grant from the Dewar Arts Awards and I maxed out a credit card!**

ZF: How did you assemble your cast and crew?

**LB: I did the casting myself, which was a lot of work. For the feature, I will be working with a casting director for the first time and it's a brave new world. I was fortunate to find Kate as she was just stunning. The supporting actors are great too - and I found them all from online casting websites. I did loads of casting for “Babe,” and I wanted to work with a non-actor because I really like filmmakers like Andrea Arnold, who did that *Fish Tank***



(2009) film where she worked with that brilliant non-actor, and one of my professors at Columbia was Ramin Bahrani who did *99 Homes* (2014) recently. When he started out, he was working with non-actors only, so he was very much of that mindset. And I did find this girl, and I really liked her. She was quite mousey but she had a watchable face and so I cast her. About a week after I cast her – we didn't have that much time before we were going to start shooting – and she said she wasn't comfortable with the material and she dropped out. It was like, "Fuck!" It's the worst nightmare, really. I had this production manager who called Claudia, and she said something about Kate, this redhead, and I said, "She's not that girl in that reel, is she?" And she said, "Yes, it was his little sister!" and I was like, "Shit! Let's get her!" And so that's how it happened. It was really a complete fluke because I don't think the film would have been as good, actually, if it had been the other girl. So that was very fortunate. Crew; I wanted to work with Monika (DOP) since I met her in New York. She happened to have the time free so she came over. She's brilliant and I'm hoping she'll work on my feature, too. The other crew was largely assembled by one of the producers, Claudia Litzka. Most of my friends who were filmmakers based in Edinburgh helped out. There was another drama because we obviously didn't have proper money to pay people for locations and stuff. When I was driving down to London to get all this camera equipment, literally three or four days before the start of shooting, we lost the main location which was that flat. I was on the M15 at a service station and I was like "Fuck!" Because with every indie filmmaker, you do most of the legwork and I've gone to loads of places and knocked on loads of doors trying to get locals to lend me their flats for a couple hundred pounds, with cap in hand, "Please, can you help me make this film?" And this woman turned out to be just a bit – I think she was a bit mentally unbalanced – and she

**was like, “No, you can’t use it anymore.” And she got the money as well, by the way. I was like, “Guys, never give the crazy people the money upfront!” But fortunately, we found these very accommodating Russian students who were obviously interested in a quick buck and they lent us their flat. It’s just stuff like that all the time. For you, as a small indie filmmaker person it would’ve been a disaster if we hadn’t got somewhere to shoot. You’re riding by the seat of your pants the whole time because you can’t pay for things properly. It’s just crazy. I think I aged quite a lot doing that.**

ZF: What strategies did you use to direct child actors, and especially the lead character, for this film?

**LB: I spent a bit of time getting Kate comfortable with me and the material. I did a lot of rehearsals with her and Dominic. I like to give actors room to do what they want and feel like they're contributing - they will often have a strong idea to play with. Kate was also very mature and professional, particularly considering her age and the subject matter.**

ZF: What were some of the challenges and difficulties making “Babe” during the pre-production or production phases?

**LB: I think the sex scene was pretty difficult and I wasn't sure how to shoot it. I came to the conclusion that it was more powerful if it wasn't shown, and I think that gamble paid off. That took a bit of figuring out. Practically, our crew was a bit on the small size, shoe string budget, so everyone had to work extra hard. But we got there.**

ZF: Was that [the decision to portray the rape offscreen] something you thought of beforehand, or did you toy with the idea of having something onscreen?

**LB: Yeah, I was just gonna have the door because I actually got inspired by another film and they didn’t do exactly that same thing, but they did something a bit similar. Then I**

thought, “Don’t bother with the door, either.” I realized pretty soon that I didn’t want to have... I thought it was just more interesting to see her reaction and figure it out and see the brother and figure it out, and there’s something really powerful in the unsaid sometimes, or the unseen. That sounds weird because we’re making films obviously, but I thought it was just interesting to play around with that.

ZF: What format did you shoot on and why?

LB: We shot on RED 4k. We used old lenses to give it a 'film' feel. I think it worked.

ZF: Did you rent your equipment or did somebody own it?

LB: I got it from Panavision. They have this thing called the New Filmmakers Award, and they’ll lend you equipment for a token fee. It was a couple hundred pounds or something, but you get all this really amazing equipment. I had to do all this application stuff and then we had to go to Panavision in London. So we went to Panavision and then we had to drive up to Scotland from London with all this camera gear worth thousands of pounds in the back of my shitty car, it was so funny. I’ll never put anyone through that ever again.

Monika [the director of photography] was like, “Don’t you have a van?” and I was like, “No!” Yeah, that was a fun journey. We used a lot of natural light and I wanted it to feel almost fresh. But there is a kind of darkness about it. I like that. The guy who did the grade was this super big colorist guy who did *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004) and stuff, but Monika managed to – because Monika’s really good at getting people to help her – but she got this guy. He did it in an hour. He was quite brilliant, so that was good. It was quite a creative project when I think about the scale... I got that grant from Dewar Arts, and I maxed out a credit card or two, and I paid for Monika to come over from LA, and my

**editor is in Austria. It was all the people I really, really wanted to work with and I really liked and respected them and thought they were talented.**

ZF: Could you describe your creative process in post-production? Did you work closely with your editor? Did anyone else have creative input during this phase other than you and Noemi?

**LB: Post production was quite intense because Noemi was based in Austria. I had to go over and work on the film, and ended up cutting a lot of it out. That was a very valuable lesson in 'less is more'. I did ask for feedback from several friends and former teachers, which was very valuable.**

ZF: This film paints a fairly bleak picture of teenage life in working class Scotland. It also seems to make a connection between a working class existence and the vulnerability of children, specifically young girls. Why did you choose to explore this aspect of working class life?

**LB: I was inspired by filmmakers like Andrea Arnold and Ken Loach.**

ZF: “Babe” is concerned with the subjectivity of a young girl on the verge of adolescence. This is not frequently depicted on film. This speaks to your overall work in portraying those with marginalized subjectivities. Why is that important to you?

**LB: I think I am generally more interested in the fringes of society; people who live outside the norm. I guess I have always felt something of an outsider. I think this is common for artists, so I channel that into my work. I am most curious about loners, about people who do their own thing. I'm also naturally interested in female experiences that have not been on film as much.**

ZF: “Babe” uses a lot of handheld camera work and natural light. This creates an "every day" kind of realism, which amplifies the horror of what happens to Babe. It also reinforces how

frequently sexual assaults occur. In what ways do you think this film critiques patriarchy and sexual violence in society, generally? In Scottish society and culture?

**LB: I think the film critiques these things with subtlety and hopefully gives rise to questions about these issues in a sensitive way. It's difficult to make a film about subject matter like this without seeming exploitative. The realism you rightly note was intended as a way to normalize the experience of watching the film. It's fairly observational, which is a style I love and will use in my forthcoming feature. It was heavily influenced by films like the Dardennes' "A Kid With a Bike." The ending, where nothing really happens and all that she's given is a breakfast in bed, does suggest that she will never be listened to about what happened to her. The likelihood is that she will not talk about it. This is the experience of a lot of kids and teenagers, and men and women, who suffer sexual abuse. They turn it inward because there's nobody to tell or no way to tell.**

ZF: "Babe" strikes me as a heartbreaking film because the young, female protagonist attempts to gain some power and agency through her interest in boxing, then after her assault seems to lose, at least temporarily, her passion for fighting and self-defense. How do you interpret the end of the film after she returns the punching bag? Is she a broken character?

**LB: It is heartbreaking. I went through a lot of endings when drafting the script. I think a lot of people who are sexually assaulted feel like they are to blame for what has happened to them. So, Babe believes that because she stole the boxing bag, she 'deserved' what happened. She takes the bag back hoping to 'erase' the hurt of what happened. I don't think she is broken. She always retains strength. But the end is bleak.**

"Babe" is a progressive film with much to admire. It thoughtfully takes on a contemporary social issue (sexual violence) from a Scottish perspective. The film takes the point

of view of a young girl, which is a choice usually made only in independent features or short films (and also animated films). In addition, the audience is able to see this issue from the victim's perspective without patronizing the character or minimizing the horror of the crime. Brydon did not make this film with the intention of displaying her commercial potential. If she had, she would have likely chosen different subject matter. The issues explored mattered to her and she did not compromise or pander to future career ambitions. There is no punchline, twist ending, or humorous sideplots. Instead, a reliance on visual storytelling from an unconventional perspective reminiscent of the work of Lynne Ramsay and even Bill Douglas make this a significant work.

The story of "Babe"'s production reflects the state of affairs for Scotland's current independent, entrepreneur filmmakers. Brydon relied on a bit of public funding (Dewar Arts Award), a fair amount of her own funds (credit card), and the goodwill of a cast and crew willing to work cheaply or for no money. In such a filmmaking culture, filmmakers are on their own to navigate a snake pit of obstacles, like a last-minute shutdown of the filming location, or numerous rejections from festivals. At the same time, it is from the ranks of the entrepreneurial short filmmaker that the Scottish film industry depends on for new talent and to grow a national feature industry. These students, independent filmmakers, and cinema club filmmakers who are the primary producers of short films in Scotland usually share two characteristics. They are young (with the exception of a good number of the cinema club members) and they have little money with which to make films. Likewise, they produce the vast majority of Scottish film fictions which tell Scottish stories, and some of these stories travel abroad at festivals or other venues. Their roles in a possibly independent nation seem even more vital as storytellers of contemporary Scottish life. These films are works of art in their own right because of their ability

to project varied Scottish subjectivities, even if the mainstream English-speaking film industry sees them only as potential calling cards. Because of these difficult circumstances and the value of the films, Scottish short filmmakers need more help, but it is in doubt whether they will get it. A future independent Scotland that values its arts will need to recognize that short films do not just support and nourish a feature film industry – they are the backbone of the nation’s film culture and its culture on film.

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

### The 99 Percent

On February 26, 2017, the American film *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) won Best Picture at the annual Academy Awards in Los Angeles. This was considered an upset because the film won over bigger budget fare, and more mainstream subject matter. It was also considered a triumph for diversity in representation because the story centers on a gay, African American man growing up in poverty. Indeed, it is all of these things, and its victory at the Oscars propelled it to a wider audience. The film's release expanded to 1,564 theaters after the Oscars from its initial release of 650 theaters. Given those facts, let us pause for perspective.

The budget for *Moonlight* was \$1.5 million (IMDB). This places it within the category of a very low-budget, independent film, but consider that number for a moment. \$1.5 million. This is nearly thirty times the median annual household income in the U.S. (a bit over \$56,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau). It is roughly 43 times the average annual Scottish household income (£23,000 according to the BBC). And yet, *Moonlight's* budget is considered shoestring for a feature by the English-speaking film industry. I point this out to emphasize that short fiction filmmaking is not an alternative form of fiction filmmaking. It is the only form of fiction filmmaking possible for 99 percent of the world. To direct a feature film of even the modest budget of *Moonlight* is akin to winning the lottery for most filmmakers. Competition for public funds for filmmaking in the UK is intense, and it will likely be more intense in the future as a result of Brexit. If Scotland votes for its independence, there will be many demands on the public purse. Money for filmmaking will understandably be a lower priority than pensions, healthcare, and infrastructure. Thus, the vast majority of all fiction films in Scotland and



throughout the world will be short fiction films made by independent artists, and few will have \$1.5 million or more to work with.

### Bingeing

In previous chapters, I reiterated that one of the chief qualities of a short film is its emphasis on brief moments, forcing viewers to contemplate them by virtue of the film's brevity. This kind of viewing, and the kind of story that emphasizes singular moments, run counter to what much of motion picture entertainment does at present. Some of the most popular filmed narratives today are the binge-able television series broadcast on platforms like Netflix, which further encourages long, uninterrupted viewing sessions of several hours by immediately starting the next episode of the series once an episode is over. In this new age of television, the extremely long narrative of the episodic series reigns. If short films force viewers to contemplate a single moment or idea, and, according to Eisenstein, they should spur action, what do exceptionally long film narratives do? It seems to me they inspire more consumption of the same series and less thoughtful contemplation if consumed en masse. Some of the most popular series like *Game of Thrones* (2011-present) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) seem to encourage audiences to accept a vague resignation to moral relativism if not outright nihilism, all the while entertaining viewers as they try to figure out who will die next. There are many wonderful television series, of course, that are both thought provoking and politically progressive, but the dozens of hours-long television narrative stands in stark contrast to the short film both in length and the way moments are treated: expendable in one, and vital in the other.

## The Worst Case Scenario

An April 2, 2017 *New York Times* article brings to light a horrifying possible direction for short films. The piece by Sapna Maheshwari describes a trend in which large corporations, like Apple and BMW, are funding high production value, high exposure short fiction films and short documentaries. These films ostensibly contain stories, however, they are stories intended to ““make people feel warmly about the brand,”” says Andrew Essex, the chief executive of Tribeca Enterprises (Maheshwari). As audiences have gone out of their way to avoid commercials by subscribing to streaming services like Netflix, or recording on DVR, the advertising business appears to be attempting to hijack the art of short films. Their moves are subtle, though, as Essex states, “The makers of these films and tellers of these stories know if this feels like overt advertising or gross product placement, people will tune out, so authenticity becomes a key metric here” (Maheshwari). The term “authenticity” combined with “key metric” create an oxymoron. What Essex really means is that the narratives must feel authentic, but the true purpose of these short films is to sell stuff. The films commissioned by these companies are infiltrating film festivals; one example is Carrie Brownstein’s film, “The Realest Real,” which is up for a Tribeca X Award. The film was funded by the Kenzo fashion brand (Maheshwari). This is a sad development, as many film festivals were havens for non-commercial filmmaking, as well as short films. If this trend gains momentum, I fear that the short fiction film could become the newest fashionable advertising vehicle. Though I doubt the executives commissioning these films have read Eisenstein, they seem to be aware that the short film has the ability to quickly respond to a moment and inspire action; the action they desire is for us to buy their products.

### A Scottish Film Studio?

During the first week of April 2017, Scottish ministers approved the construction of a £230 million film studio to be located on the outskirts of Edinburgh (Williams). Citing the fact that Scotland lost out on the opportunities to contract *Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) and *Game of Thrones*, the Scottish Government anticipates up to 900 jobs will be created, according to chief planner John McNairney (Williams). The details of the project are impressive: a 130,000 square-foot studio, a new film school, retail, office, and commercial space on an 86 acre site (Williams). This is a positive development for a country that has struggled to create a film industry of its own for almost a century. The key question, aside from its financial stability, will be what cultural work will Scots demand of this studio? Will its main purpose be to lure Hollywood productions, or provide opportunities for Scots, or some combination of both? Will there be any place for short films in this brand new facility? The fact that the site is scheduled to host a film school indicates that very well could be the case, yet the chief justification for this studio is economic, not cultural. Financing and building is the easy part; deciding what kind of film culture Scotland wants to create in its first-ever national film studio is much more difficult. As these pages demonstrate, entrepreneurial filmmaking is the model most prevalent now, and entrepreneurs most often seek profits. I hope that this new arm of the Scottish film industry does not succumb completely to the whims of the market and chase after blockbuster films and television shows. Instead, I would rather see a significant place for marginalized filmmakers, and for bringing subjectivities to the screen that often go overlooked.

## Final Thoughts

Scottish short fiction films do not pin down some kind of clear Scottish national identity. They are far too diverse and multifaceted for that, as I hope to have shown in the previous pages. Instead of focusing on identity, many of the films studied here, and many that I screened but could not fit into these pages, are much more concerned with Scottish subjectivities – stories, experiences, feelings, and ideas. Some of these are quite abstract, and some respond to specific social or political issues of their time. Furthermore, Scottish short fiction films were, and still are, the most numerous Scottish fictions on screen. These films matter because they succinctly express the experiences of others; they can contradict those in power and the establishment; they provide a space for marginalized filmmakers; and sometimes they are just plain fun. I hope that Scotland's short filmmakers continue that work in spite of the pressures of an entrepreneurial film culture and neoliberal economics that dominate many kinds of filmmaking.

There is much more to be said about Scottish short films, and Scottish cinema more generally. In the end, this project represents a small contribution to the work needed on the short film. Its goal was to uncover a bit of the breadth and depth of Scotland's short films, and, in so doing, short films as a whole.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Scottish Short Fiction Films Discussed in this Text

- “An Iobairt (The Sacrifice).” 1996. Directed by Gerda Stevenson. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Babe.” 2013. Directed by Lucy Brydon. Available on Vimeo with the director’s permission.
- “Chick’s Day.” 1950. Directed by Enrico Coccozza. Available at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: [movingimage.nls.uk](http://movingimage.nls.uk).
- “Come Dancing.” 1970. Directed by Bill Douglas. Available as a special feature of the BFI’s 3-Disc Dual Format Edition DVD of the *Bill Douglas Trilogy*, 2012. Region 2.
- “Duck.” 1998. Directed by Kenny Glenaan. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Hell Unltd.” 1936. Directed by Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar. Available at: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=tiflnw\\_EsjU](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=tiflnw_EsjU).
- “The Host.” 1988. Directed by Pat O’Neill. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Initiation.” 1996. Directed by Martin McCardie. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo.” 1955. Directed by Margaret Tait. Available at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: [movingimage.nls.uk](http://movingimage.nls.uk).
- “Portfolio to Trouble.” 1981. Directed by Archie Craig and George Juner. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “The Quiet Man.” 2013. Directed by Jim Closs. Available at: [ecvs.dreamhosters.com/showcase\\_quietman.html](http://ecvs.dreamhosters.com/showcase_quietman.html)
- “Twilight.” 1955. Directed by Enrico Coccozza. Available at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: [movingimage.nls.uk](http://movingimage.nls.uk).
- “Winner Takes All.” 1968. Directed by Billy Rae. Available at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: [movingimage.nls.uk](http://movingimage.nls.uk)

## APPENDIX B:

### Other Noteworthy Scottish Short Fiction Films

- “The Beauty of the Common Tool.” 1996. 16mm. Directed by Owen Thomas. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Billy and Zorba.” 1999. 35mm. Directed by Brian Kirk. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Bongo Erotico.” 1959. 16mm. Directed by Enrico Coccozza. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “The Cat.” 1956. 16mm. Directed by Enrico Coccozza. Available at: [movingimage.nls.uk/](http://movingimage.nls.uk/)
- “Dancing.” 1995. Directed by Steven Rimkus. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Fantasmagoria.” 1948. Directed by Enrico Coccozza. Available at: [movingimage.nls.uk/](http://movingimage.nls.uk/)
- “Gasman.” 1998. Directed by Lynne Ramsay. Available on the Special Features of the *Ratcatcher* (1999) DVD. Region 1.
- “Joy Ride.” 1989. Dalziel Cine Club. Super 8mm. Directed by Evelyn Law. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Marcie’s Dowry.” 1999. 35mm. Directed by David Mackenzie. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Mixed Doubles.” 1988. Dalziel Cine Club. Super 8mm. Directed by Evelyn Law. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Poached.” 1999. 35mm. Directed by Justin Molotnikov. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Small Deaths.” 1996. Directed by Lynne Ramsay. Available on the Special Features of the *Ratcatcher* (1999) DVD. Region 1.
- “Sealladh (The Vision).” 1992. Directed by Douglas Mackinnon. Available at: <https://youtube.com/watch/?v=eZ24X-6BzMo>.
- “The Star.” 1996. 35 mm. Directed by David Moore. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.
- “Trouble Brewing.” 1975. Edinburgh Cine Society. Super 8mm. Directed by S. Sievwright. Available on VHS at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.

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Finch, Zach. Review of *Maya Deren: Incomplete Control*, by Sarah Keller. *Film Criticism* 40.2. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/f/fc/13761232.0040.317/--sarah-keller-maya-deren-incomplete-control-columbia?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

Finch, Zach. Review of *Performing Authorship: Self-Inscription and Corporeality in the Cinema*, by Cecilia Sayad. *Journal of Film and Video*, 68.1, 2016, pp. 58-59.

### Teaching

University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha, WI  
ENGL 100: Fundamentals of English and ENGL 101: Composition and Reading

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI  
ENG 101: Introduction to College Writing  
ENG 102: College Writing and Research

ENG/FILM STUDIES/ART HISTORY 111 Online: Introduction to Entertainment Media  
FILM STUDIES 212: The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock  
FILM STUDIES 212: Introduction to the Fantasy Film

#### Awards

James A. Sappenfield Fellowship. Spring 2016. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
English Department.

Student Success Award 2014-2015. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Teaching  
award.